

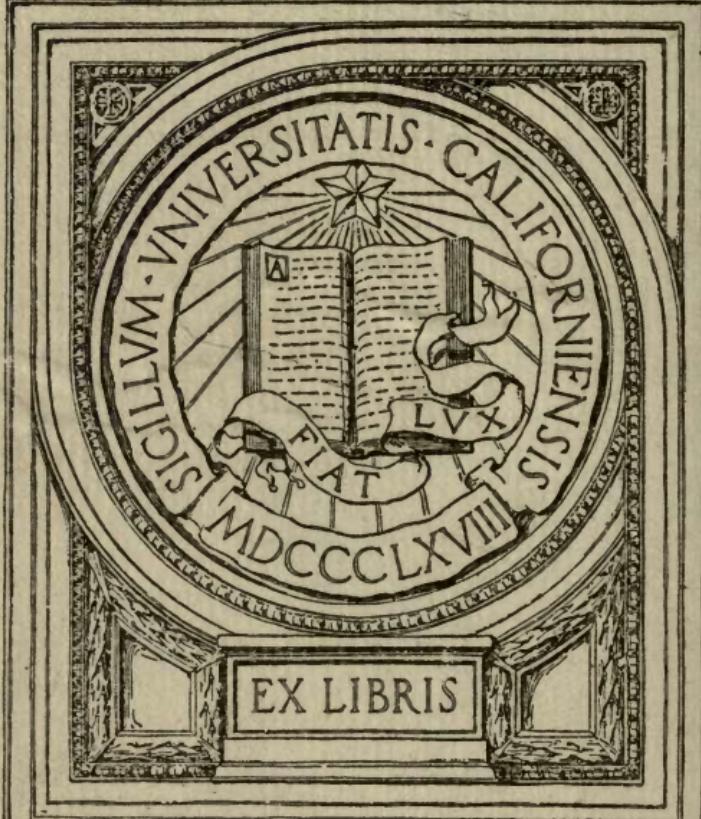
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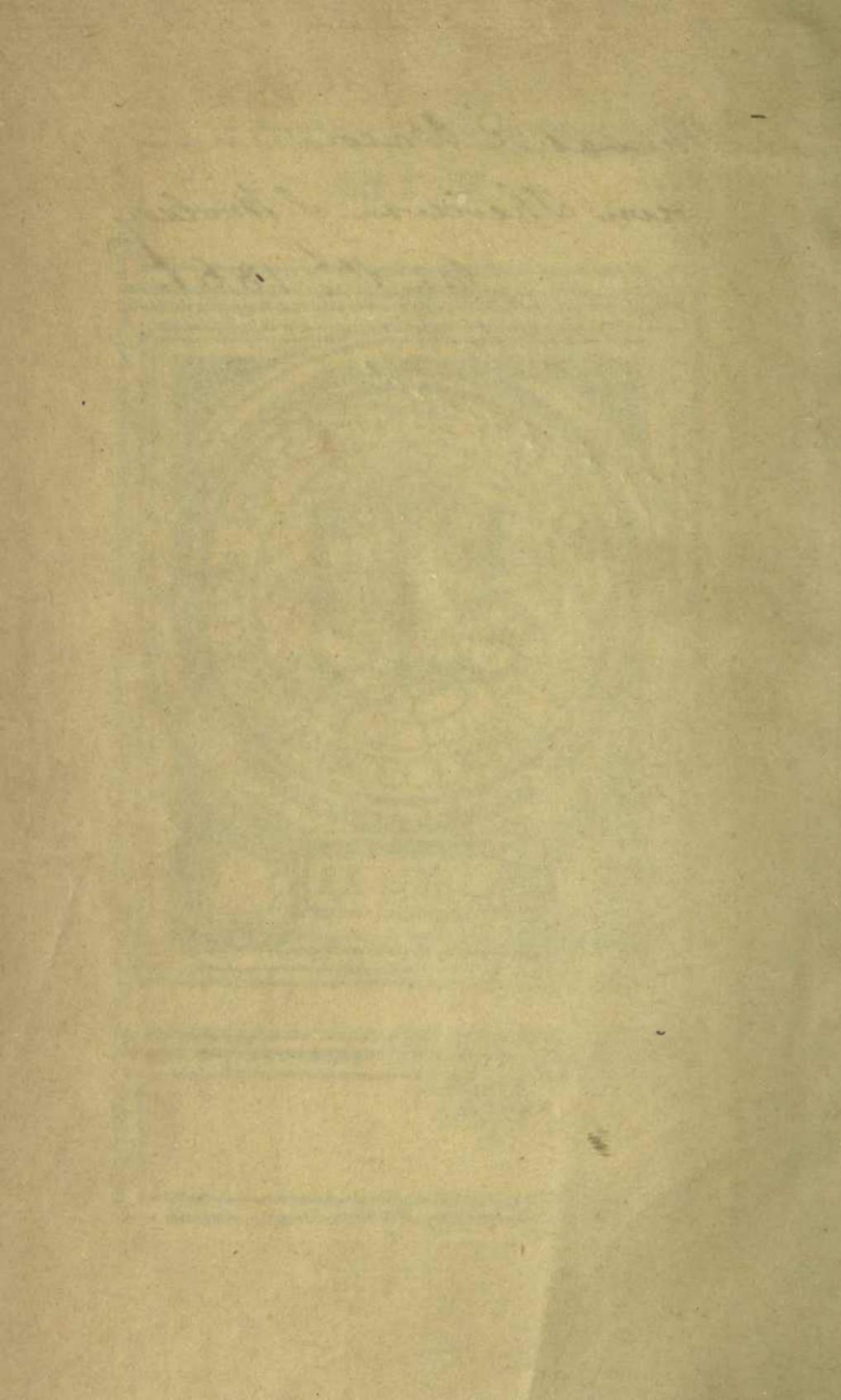


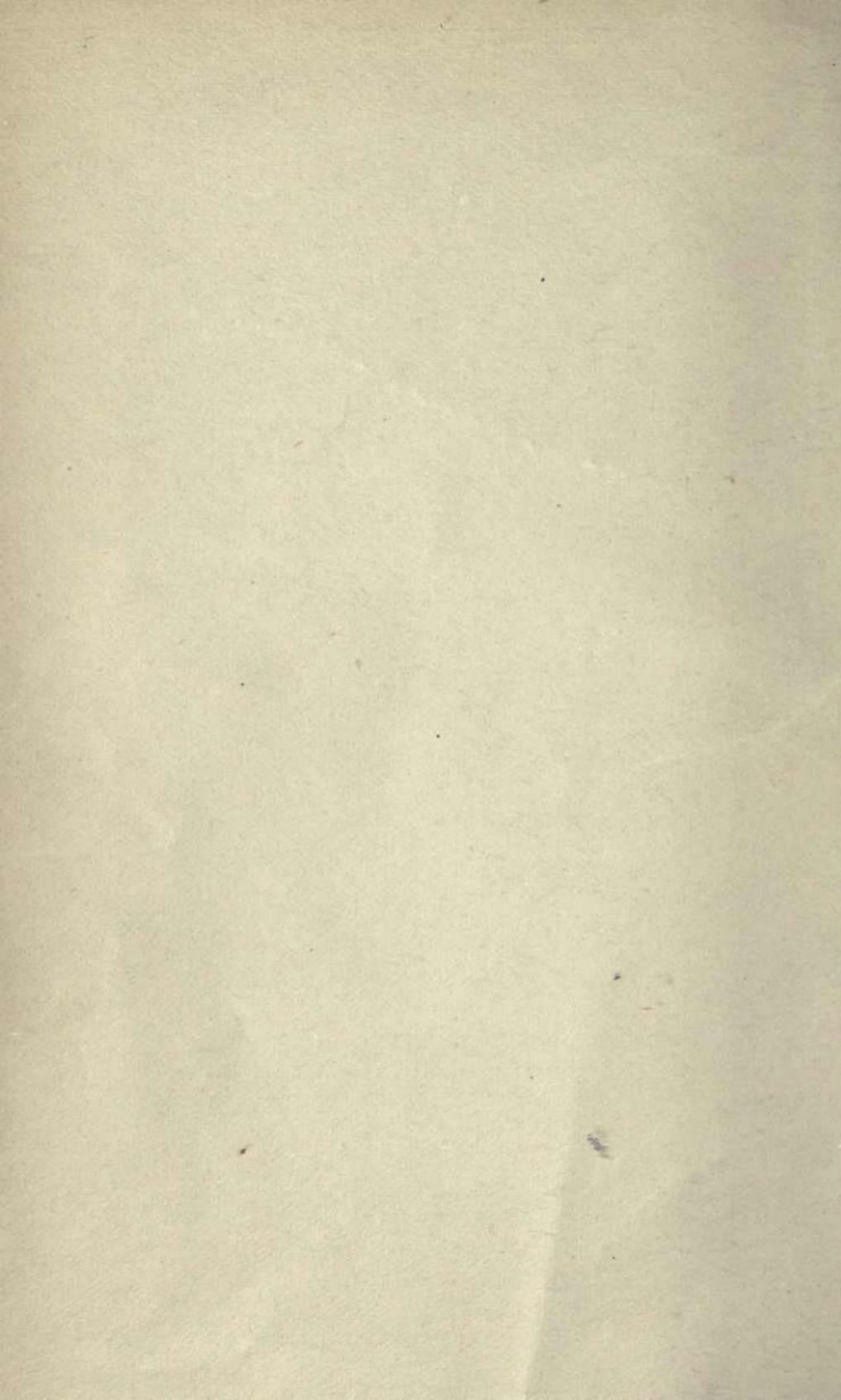
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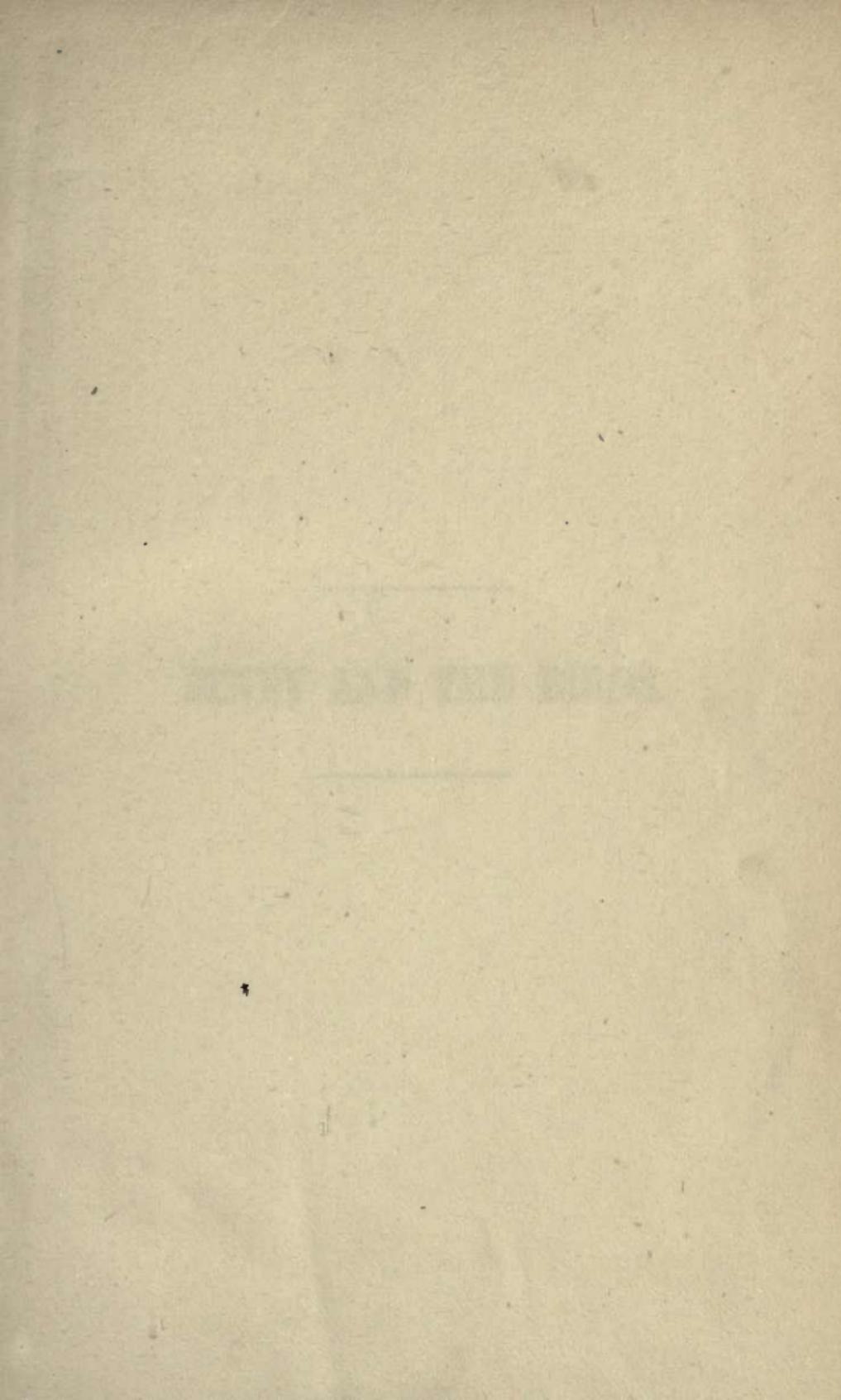


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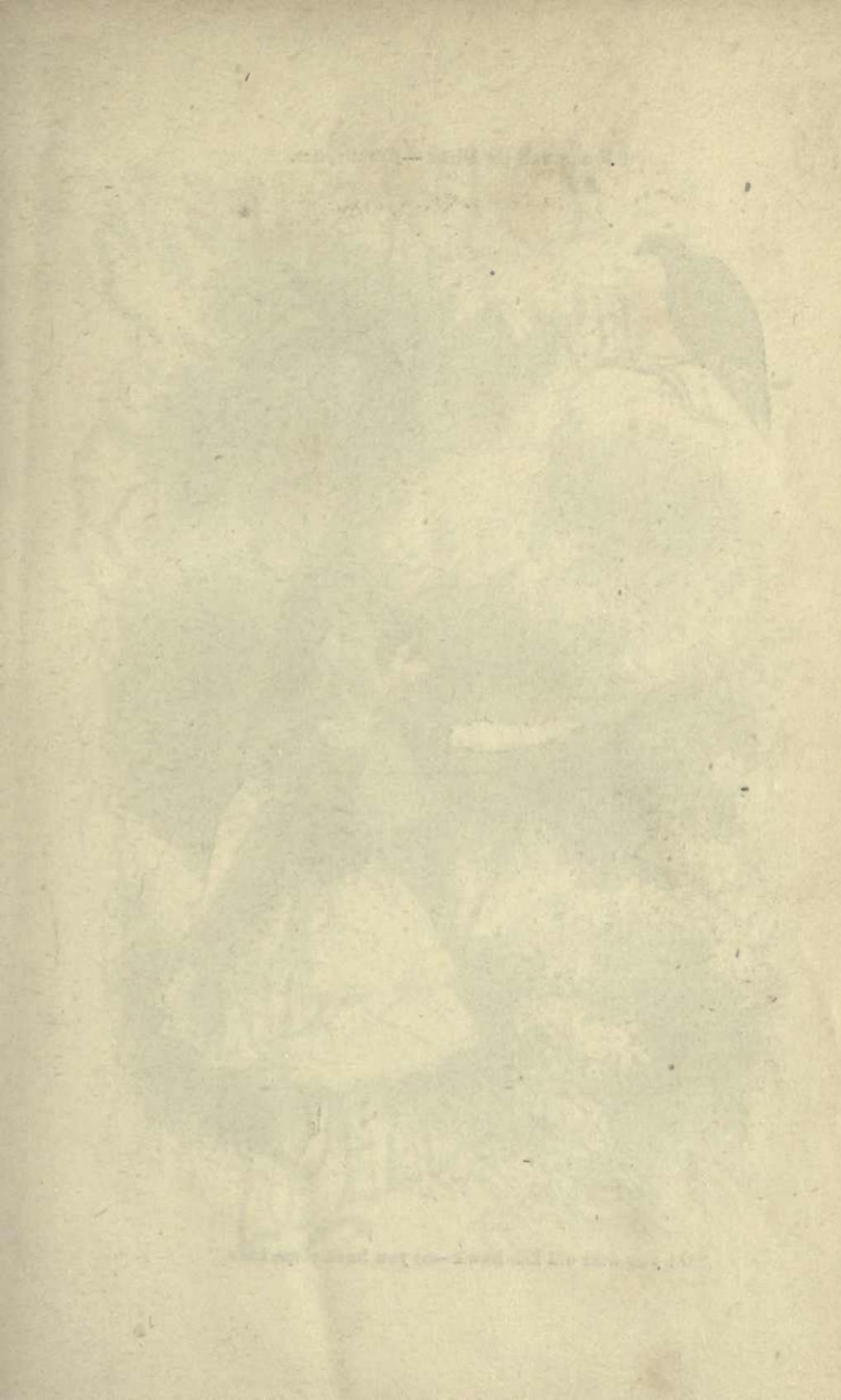




THE FIELD

JENNY AND THE BIRDS.

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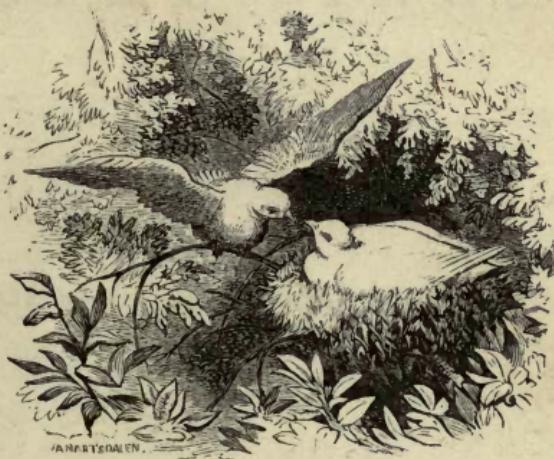
Jenny and the Birds —Frontispiece.



“O ! you dear old fish-hawk—so you have come back.”

p. 9.

JENNY AND



ABERTSDALE.

THE BIRDS



JENNY

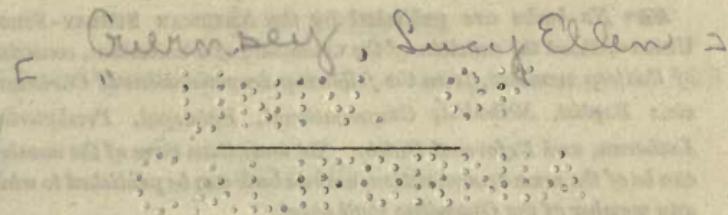
AND

THE BIRDS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“JENNY AND THE INSECTS,” “IRISH AMY,” &c.

Guernsey, Lucy Ellen



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
AN HONEST FISHERMAN.....	9

CHAPTER II.

A STARING BROWN OWL.....	45
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A CROW.....	76
------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

FLY-CATCHERS.....	110
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER V.

ROBIN-REDBREAST.....	144
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. WREN AND HER FRIENDS.....	171
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
A SKILFUL CARPENTER.....	202

CHAPTER VIII.

COCK-TURKEY.....	228
------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

GOOSY GANDER AND HIS FRIENDS.....	266
-----------------------------------	-----

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA.

JENNY AND THE BIRDS.

CHAPTER I.

AN HONEST FISHERMAN.



ow-d'y-e-do, Jenny?

Jenny. Oh, you dear old fish-hawk! So you have come back? You stayed away so long that I began to think something or other must have happened to you. I have been watching for you

every day since March came in.

Fish-hawk. And I should have been here before, but the weather was so cold and stormy that I did not like to travel. And, after all, I arrived in the midst of a snow-storm

only yesterday, and to-day I have been putting the old house a little to rights before settling down for the season.

Jenny. I hope you found it in pretty good order.

Fish-hawk. Why, tolerably good, thank you. We put it all in order before we left it last fall; but my greatest fear was that I should find the tree itself blown down, for it has been dead two or three years.

Jenny. What would you have done then?

Fish-hawk. Oh, I should have looked out for another near by, and built a new nest. We like this place too well to be in haste to leave it. I rather think I should have taken possession of that oak,—though I had partly promised it to some young cousins of my wife, who are just about to begin housekeeping. I am very glad they are coming, for we fish-hawks are fond of society, and like to build near each other. In some parts of the country you will often see thirty or forty of our nests within a piece of land no larger than this farm. When these young folks arrive, we shall have a kind of house-warming for them;

and you will see what a number of us will come together to welcome them. There will very likely be thirty or forty of us all settled upon one tree, talking in our native language, and after that the young couple will set to work to build their nest.

Jenny. It must be very pleasant to be so friendly and sociable among yourselves. I think it is much better than living in a sulky and lonely way, like the eagles.

Fish-hawk. Why, as to that, tastes differ, you know. They have their ways, and we have ours; and we do not find fault with each other.

Jenny. Not about that, perhaps, but about other things!

Fish-hawk. When I say we do not quarrel, I am thinking of the golden eagle and the great fishing eagle,—the bird of Washington, the most noble of all the family,—and not of that mean and cowardly fellow, the bald eagle, who lives by robbing people who work hard to support their mates and families. I should think he would be ashamed to show himself in decent society. But, instead of that, he comes

sailing and perching about here as boldly as if he were the noblest bird in the world. But let me or my mate be at the trouble of catching a good-sized fish, and then see! Down he comes, directly over my head, beating the air with his great wings and screaming loud enough to deafen one. I try my best to rise above him, but his wings are larger than mine, and he has no fish in his claws to encumber his motions. Sometimes I succeed in getting away; but more commonly I am obliged to drop the fish I have honestly earned, and the eagle, seizing it before it touches the water, carries it off to the woods, while I have to go to work and catch another, or return supperless to my family. Do you wonder, after that, that I should hate the bald eagle?

Jenny. No, indeed, I don't! The cowardly thief! But does he never catch fish for himself?

Fish-hawk. Not very often; and when he does try he makes an awkward business of it. You would laugh heartily to see him wading after them in the shallow water and pecking at them with his bill. Not content with rob-

bing us, he actually attacks the turkey buzzards and makes them disgorge what they have swallowed. Besides this, he catches wild ducks and geese, small gulls, snipes and other birds, kills young lambs and pigs, and picks out the eyes of old and sickly sheep. On the Northern and Western rivers, he and his mate join to pursue the wild swan, which, as you may imagine, has little chance of escape with two such foes opposed to her. The poor thing tries hard for its life,—turns and winds, and, above all, strives to gain the water; but her relentless persecutors attack her from above and below at the same time. She is both heavy and weak, and sooner or later the eagle strikes her under the wing. Down she falls, killed or mortally wounded, and he and his mate feast upon her.

Jenny. That seems very cruel.

Fish-hawk. I don't know that I should call it so. As long as he honestly provides his own game, I do not find fault with him; but I don't want him to rob me. However, if we get three or four families of fish-hawks settled here

together, we shall soon drive him out of the neighbourhood.

Jenny. Is it true that the king-bird will attack him?

Fish-hawk. Yes, that he will, and very often drive him off, too. I have seen one of these brave little fellows follow him fully a mile, every now and then rising above him and pouncing down on his back and head like lightning. The king-bird does not even fear the great golden eagle, but attacks him whenever he makes his appearance. I believe the eagle thinks there is something diverting in the impudence of the king-bird, for he seldom or never turns upon him.

Jenny. What sort of nest does the bald eagle build?

Fish-hawk. He generally selects some tall old tree, often in the midst of a swamp, where he piles up stout sticks, sods and hay till he makes a large platform, upon which the eggs are laid. Like ourselves, the bald eagles use the same nest year after year, making it their home even when they are not raising a family. He is a bird that provides well for his own,—I

will say that much for him,—and his mate and young ones always have more food than they can eat. They are very fond of their young, too, and will cheerfully risk their own lives to save them. I once knew a case in which a tree containing a bald eagle's nest was set on fire in some way before the young ones were able to fly. The poor mother rushed again and again into the midst of the roaring flames to try and save her nestlings; and even after her own wings were so burned that she could hardly make her escape, she returned for one more effort. Oh, yes, there is some good even about the bald eagle. In fact, there seems to be good in almost every one,—though I own it is sometimes hard to be discovered when one is angry.

Jenny. I think you mentioned the golden eagle.

Fish-hawk. I did. He is a quiet old fellow so far as we are concerned,—though he does great execution upon hares, rabbits and birds, as well as upon sheep and pigs. The golden eagles are not nearly so common as they used to be; and I have not seen one in this part of

the country for some years,—though I met several when I was at the North. They are very abundant round Hudson's Bay and in Labrador, and now and then a few are found in New England; but they are not fond of the society of man, and love solitary mountains and desolate wastes better than meadows and cultivated farms.

Jenny. I do not admire their taste if they like to live in Labrador. It must be a most uninviting region even in summer, and a thousand times worse in winter.

Fish-hawk. To you, doubtless, it would be so, but not to him. His warm feathers protect him from the cold, and he finds abundance of the food he likes best. Moreover, a feeling of security makes amends for every disadvantage.

Jenny. Is he the one the Indians call the war-eagle? I read about Keneu, the great war-eagle, in some poem.

Fish-hawk. Yes, he is the same. The Indians prize his plumage so highly that they will give a good horse for the tail-feathers of a single bird. With these plumes they ornament

their heads and the stems of the pipes which they use upon great occasions; and some of them have an idea that an arrow which is plumed with an eagle's feather cannot miss its aim.

Jenny. Is he as fond of his family as the bald eagle?

Fish-hawk. Quite as much so, I should think, for he will fight for his young ones till he loses his own life or, as it sometimes happens, takes that of his assailant. It is no safe undertaking to rob an eagle's nest. He provides well for his family, as I said. At the same time, if the little ones stay on the nest too long, the parents do not hesitate to drive them out. They take a great deal of pains in teaching them to fly; and it is said that the old bird supports them at first on her back till they have gained a little confidence in their own powers. I have never seen them do this; but I have learned it on very good authority, and it seems natural enough.

Jenny. From what does the golden eagle take his name?

Fish-hawk. From the beautiful orange brown

of his head and neck, which appears of a golden hue in the sunshine. The rest of his body is clouded with different shades of brown, except the tail, which is grayish in the elder and almost white in the young birds. The legs, as well as the skin which surrounds the bill and eyes, called the cere, are of a bright yellow, while the eyes are brown.

Jenny. Is it true that the eagle sometimes lives a hundred years?

Fish-hawk. I should think it probable that he may live even longer.

Jenny. It seems a great age for a bird.

Fish-hawk. It does, indeed; but several birds are very long-lived. Why, even a gander has been known to live to the age of eighty years.

Jenny. Is there any other eagle besides those you have mentioned?

Fish-hawk. Did I not mention the great fishing eagle, the Bird of Washington, as Mr. Audubon calls him?

Jenny. I think you just mentioned his name; but I never heard of him before. He ought to be a fine fellow, to have such a grand title.

Fish-hawk. He is a fine fellow. He measures half a foot more than the golden eagle, and his wings have a spread of ten feet. The longest quill in his wing is more than two feet. His plumage is dark coppery brown above and yellowish underneath, with a dark mark in the middle of each feather. These grand eagles are more common at the West than here, though they are not very abundant anywhere. They live upon fish, like the bald eagle, but catch their food for themselves instead of stealing it. I never had any personal acquaintance with one of these birds, but, by what I have heard from those who know them, I should judge that they well deserve the good character which every one gives them. It is a grand sight to see one of them sailing round and round in great circles, hardly seeming to move his enormous wings, or mounting straight up into the heavens as though to seek the very sun itself.

Jenny. It must be so, indeed. What a pity the Americans did not take him for their standard, instead of the bald eagle !

Fish-hawk. Perhaps they would have done

so if they had been acquainted with him; but very little was known of him till Mr. Audubon discovered him and gave him a name.

Jenny. I should think the birds would be very much obliged to Mr. Audubon for learning and telling so much about them.

Fish-hawk. Should you? Suppose some stranger—from one of the stars, for instance—should come down to this world to write a book about men, and should go round among you, here shooting a doctor and there catching a minister in a trap, and then coming into your nursery and stealing your little sisters, and suppose he should then go back to the star and write a book about you all: I don't think you would feel very much obliged to him, even if he did make beautiful pictures of the men he had shot.

Jenny. Perhaps not. I never thought of it in that way. But I am sure men, at all events, have reason to be thankful to him, since he has told us a great deal about birds that we never knew before, and should not have found out but for him.

Fish-hawk. Ah, that is very likely; and I

admit that men are much indebted to him for his book.

Jenny. I have heard of the great condor of South America. Is he of the eagle family?

Fish-hawk. Not he. The eagles despise him and his whole race,—though it must be admitted that they are related to us. The condor is a vulture, and belongs to the same class as the turkey buzzard and the black vulture.

Jenny. What is the difference between the vulture and the eagle?

Fish-hawk. There are many points of difference. The head of the vulture is almost always naked or covered with woolly down. His claws are comparatively weak, and resemble those of a hen more than those of an eagle. They mostly carry their wings half open, and sit in a lounging, half-crouching attitude, instead of an erect and dignified posture, like the eagles and hawks. Above all, they are very filthy birds, preferring putrid and decaying substances to fresh meat or fish, and rarely killing for themselves unless driven to it by extreme hunger. The condor, however, as well as the vulture of the Alps, does

hunt and kill game. Two condors will attack and kill a cow, a large deer, or even a puma; and it has been said that they will carry off children and even attack men,—though I suspect this is an exaggeration. The vulture of the Alps is more like the eagle in his habits. He will not eat carrion if he can get any thing else, and pounces upon hares, kids, and even sheep, as boldly as the golden eagle himself, though, unlike the eagle, he devours his prey on the spot, his claws not being strong enough to carry off any considerable weight.

Jenny. Then I should think the stories of his carrying off children could hardly be true. I have read that one of them stole a little boy three or four years old, and all that his parents ever found of him was his little red jacket in the vulture's nest.

Fish-hawk. I do not think a vulture could carry off a child of that age; and the story is opposed to the general habit of that bird, which generally eats its prey on the spot where it is seized. I could much sooner believe such a tale of an eagle, which can carry a considerable weight in its claws, and

which has the habit of conveying whole to its nest the game which it takes. I once knew of a bald eagle trying to steal a child. Its mother had set the little one down to play while she was weeding in the garden, when she suddenly heard it scream. Looking round, she saw it thrown down and dragged some distance, while a bald eagle was flying away with a part of its frock. He had caught the child's clothes, which, having torn with the weight, saved the little fellow's life.

Jenny. What a frightful story! I shall dislike the bald eagle more than ever after this.

Fish-hawk. Oh, he meant no harm. I presume he saw no reason why he should not take a baby for his dinner as well as a fish or a wild duck. But to return to our vultures. The condor was once supposed to be the largest bird in the world. Like some other folks, however, he is not exactly so great as he appears at a distance, and by actual measurement he does not exceed the size of Audubon's great eagle. He inhabits the lofty and desolate slopes of the Andes, where he makes his nest

(such as it is) and rears his young, which he is said to feed for a whole year. Here he may be seen, perched on a crag, half asleep, and slowly recovering himself after his last meal, or sailing around, often at a height of six miles above the plain, often far higher than the clouds themselves, so that a thunderstorm may be raging below while he is basking in clear sunshine. Think what an eye he must have, to be able to discover his prey at such a distance!

Jenny. Can he really see so far as that?

Fish-hawk. Probably much farther. Let a horse or cow fall from fatigue or death upon one of the great plains of South America, and, though previously there may not have been a condor anywhere in sight, in five minutes you may see one or more of these birds sailing around and coming nearer with every circle, till in the course of half an hour three or four will be occupied in tearing the carcass to pieces. They often eat so much that they can hardly rise from the ground; and when in this situation, the Indians catch them with the lasso.

The Californian and the king vultures are next in size to the condor. The latter is entirely white, except the coverts and quills of the wings, the tail and a small part of the back. The turkey buzzards pay him great deference. A dozen or more of them may be feasting in their filthy way upon the carcass of a horse, quarrelling and fighting among themselves as they always do, but let one of the king vultures make his appearance, and immediately all retire to a respectful distance, waiting for his majesty to finish his meal before they again venture to approach their banquet. You have seen the turkey buzzard, perhaps?

Jenny. No; but I have heard my grandmother tell of them. She saw plenty of them at the South. She said they went about the streets almost as tamely as chickens, picking up every thing they could find, and that it was against the law to kill one.

Fish-hawk. True. They are very useful in those warm climates, for nothing in the eating line seems to come amiss to them; and thus they clear the streets of a great deal of filth

and garbage, which if left to decay would not only be offensive but also very unhealthy. In this work they are assisted by the black vultures, sometimes called carrion-crows, which are as fond of this kind of fare as themselves. After they have finished their meal, you may see them sitting on house-tops and steeples, as still as if made of wood, only now and then stretching out their wings, which they always carry half open. They look very stupid and moping, and one might think they were in the depths of melancholy; whereas they are enjoying a buzzard's idea of perfect felicity. They never trouble themselves to build a nest, but take possession of a hollow log or stump, laying from two to four eggs on the rotten wood. The male watches while the female is sitting, and is at great pains to feed her. I must say that the turkey buzzards are very harmless and useful creatures, and mind their own business better than most birds. We naturally do not care to associate with them, on account of their dirty habits; but we never molest them, and they, on their part, let us alone. I might have mentioned their flight,

which, though slower, is almost as majestic as that of the golden eagle himself. They are fond of soaring slowly upwards in circles, frequently rising even above the clouds; and they are very apt to indulge in this exercise just before a thunder-storm. The carrion-crows or black vultures, as well as the Californian vulture and condor, make a short run before beginning their flight; while the turkey buzzards rise with a single spring, like the eagle.

Jenny. I think the buzzards deserve all the protection they get from man. And really, Mr. Fish-hawk, I think it is silly to look with contempt upon any animal. God made them all; and I suppose he knew what they were good for.

Fish-hawk. That is very true, my little girl. He has made every thing beautiful in its season, and takes care of it after it is made; and, though we should not wish to make companions of the turkey buzzards, there is no reason why we should look down on them. To be sure, it is difficult not to get out of patience with the bald eagle when, as I have said, he steals our

fish; but probably he too has his uses. No doubt you feel very much so towards the hawk which takes your ducks and chickens.

Jenny. Yes, indeed. I hardly know any thing more provoking and vexatious. But do you know my old yellow hen actually drove off a hawk the other day and saved her chickens? He came down between the grape-vine trellis and the house, and she flew at him in such a fury that he was very glad to retreat. You don't know how proud she was when she came back.

Fish-hawk. I dare say; and, indeed, it was quite a grand feat for a hen. What sort of a hawk was it?

Jenny. I don't know. I did not see it distinctly.

Fish-hawk. I presume it was the red-tailed hawk, which is more common about here than any other, except the little sparrow-hawk, which, however, does not often trouble poultry-yards.

Jenny. I think hawks are beautiful birds,— their flight is so graceful, and they stand up so straight and look so dignified when they

perch. I don't wonder people used to make pets of them in the old time when they used them for hunting.

Fish-hawk. For hunting! How was that? I should think the hawks would have preferred to hunt for themselves.

Jenny. I dare say they would; but perhaps you are not informed that people used to take them from the nests and train them on purpose, keeping them in the dark and without food till they grew quite tame. Then, when the poor little hawks got so hungry that they were glad to take food from any one, they fed them from the hand, or from a thing made something in the shape of a bird, called a lure, till the bird became attached to his keeper. After the hawk was thoroughly trained, the hunter, or, as he was called, the falconer, put a hood on his head, and straps, called jesses, on his legs, and, placing him on his wrist or hand, carried him out into the field. As soon as he saw the game—heron, or wild duck, or whatever it was—he uncovered the head of the falcon and showed it to him, at the same time letting him go. The falcon gave chase, of course, and all

the gentlemen and ladies put spurs to their horses and galloped after to see the end. Each of the birds would try to get uppermost; but the falcon generally gained the victory, and, pouncing on the prey, brought it to the ground. Then the falconer hurried up, and, after giving the falcon his share of the plunder, he replaced his hood and straps, and they set off to look for other game. Sometimes, however, the tables were turned, and the falcon was killed by being spitted on the heron's long, sharp beak as he came down upon him.*

* Those who are curious upon the subject of hawking may find full accounts of the sport in almost any cyclopaedia; and abundant allusions to it occur in all the old ballads and romances. It was practised by all the Northern nations from remote antiquity, and continued in vogue in England until a late day. Efforts have lately been made to revive it, but the writer does not learn with what success. It is easy to see that when game was abundant, and there were few enclosures to interfere with rapid riding, the sport must have been very exciting. Oddly enough as it seems to our ideas, one of the most esteemed manuals of hawking was compiled by Madame Juliana Berners, a lady abbess. Atkinson, in his delightful Travels in Eastern Siberia, gives an animated account of the taking of deer by means of the great golden eagle, there called the beareoote. It was necessary to take the hawk from the nest at an early age, as an old hawk could not be reclaimed. Very large prices were often paid for well-trained birds.

Fish-hawk. But suppose the game escaped: what became of the hawk?

Jenny. Oh, the falconer coaxed him back again by swinging the lure or jingling the bells on his hood.

Fish-hawk. If I had been in his place, instead of pursuing the game, I would have soared away into the clouds and left them to kill their own heron.

Jenny. I suppose they sometimes did so; for I have heard of birds being caught in wild plains, with a silver band on one leg, engraved with the name of the owner. But in general they became attached to the people that brought them up and fed them. Perhaps they felt grateful for the care bestowed upon them.

Fish-hawk. I rather think I should have considered the stealing of me in the first place a fair set-off against all the care that was taken of me afterwards,—especially as it was all prompted by selfishness. But is this sport practised now-a-days?

Jenny. I rather think not; though I believe some English gentlemen still keep hawks.

Father read to us out of a book of travels that the people of Eastern Siberia still use them, and even employ the golden eagle in the same way to kill deer and such larger game.

Fish-hawk. Do you know what sort of hawks were generally used in this way?

Jenny. The goshawk and Peregrine falcon, and the jer-falcon, for the larger birds, and the kestrel and merlin for the little ones. I do not know whether any of them live in this country.

Fish-hawk. I have met the jer-falcon at the North,—especially in Labrador; but I never heard of his visiting these regions. He is a fine, bold fellow, greatly attached to his wife and family,—so much so, that if his mate is attacked he comes down like an arrow to rescue her, and thus it often happens that he shares the same fate. He is very fond of wild ducks, and destroys a great many. I have seen plenty of Peregrine falcons of late years; though when I was young they were very uncommon. The Peregrine falcon flies very rapidly; and it is really a beautiful sight to see him pursuing his prey. No matter how swift

its flight or how ingenious its doublings and windings, he always comes up with it at last, and, striking it with his claws, forces it to the ground, where he eats it at his leisure, first picking off all the feathers; for he is a very neat feeder. Should he happen to strike it over the water, he generally carries it off in his claws to the woods. He is a very impudent fellow, and fears nothing. I have seen him stoop, and, picking up a wild duck which had been shot, carry it off under the very nose of the fowler and eat it himself.

Jenny. I think that was hardly fair. Did you not speak of the sparrow-hawk?

Fish-hawk. I believe I said that he did not often attack poultry; but he is very destructive to the little birds, such as the chipping-bird and bluebird. I dare say you may have seen him,—a pretty, trim little fellow, with beautiful plumage of blue and brown, and very upright and dignified in his carriage.

Jenny. Yes, I think I remember him; but he is such a pretty little fellow that I never thought of his being a bird of prey. I shall

not like him so well now I know that he eats the dear little bluebirds and phebe-birds.

Fish-hawk. Just as though the dear little bluebirds and phebe-birds did not eat dear little butterflies and moths! And don't you eat little chickens and pigeons, I should like to know,—not to mention little fish and other little animals?

Jenny. Yes, that is true. We are no better than the rest.

Fish-hawk. Indeed, I think you are rather worse; for the sparrow-hawk kills only just what he needs for food. He does not slaughter ten times as much as he can eat, merely "for the fun of the thing," as men do.

Jenny. Perhaps we had better stop making comparisons. What sort of nest does the sparrow-hawk make?

Fish-hawk. He seldom builds for himself, but takes up with the deserted habitation of some other bird, and is very fond of the hole of a woodpecker. The female lays four or five eggs, of a buff color, spotted with black. She and her mate take turns in sitting, and are very kind and attentive to each other all

the time that the work is going on. As soon as the young ones are able to fly, their parents lead them out into the field and instruct them in the art of catching mice and other small game. They are very fond of making choice of some particular perching-place, and keep possession of these posts for a long time together, never interfering with each other. But we have been talking a long time, Jenny, and I believe I must go off and catch a fish. You can stay here and watch me, if you like. I dare say I shall not have to go far.

Jenny. There he goes, sailing over the lake in great circles, hardly seeming to move his wings as he flies. How I should like to mount up so high and look down on the world from the clouds! Here comes his mate. She has caught her fish already. I have noticed that among birds of prey the female is always the largest; perhaps because she has the most work to do. There! he sees his fish, and down he goes like a thunderbolt. Ah, but he has missed it that time! The fish has sunk out of his reach, and there he goes, sailing easily over the surface of the water, looking for another.

There he goes again, making the water foam round him as he plumps in; and now up he rises, with a great fish in his claws, and, shaking himself, comes flying to land. I am glad the ugly eagle is not here to take it away from him. Well, you had good luck with your fishing this time, hadn't you?

Fish-hawk. Pretty fair! The fish are very abundant just now.

Jenny. What is the reason that you never come down to pick up a fish that you have dropped?

Fish-hawk. Oh, it is too much trouble; and I do not like to eat a fish that has fallen on the ground. I would rather catch a fresh one. Every good housekeeper will tell you that fish requires careful handling, else it is not good.

Jenny. Do you never eat any thing but fish?

Fish-hawk. Never. Happily, there is seldom a want of our favourite food; and when the waters are frozen up in one place we can go to another: so that we are never at a loss.

Jenny. Well, good-by, Mr. Fish-hawk. I must go home now.

Fish-hawk. Good-by, dear. Come down again about the day after to-morrow, and we shall be happy to show you how we celebrate our weddings. I must go to work meantime and help my mate put the nest in order for our new brood.

The fish-hawk seems to be a favourite with every one. Ornithologists, fishermen and farmers all unite in giving him an excellent character for honesty and good temper. He never quarrels with his own relatives; never interferes with other birds; never steals poultry or kills lambs; and, as he makes his appearance at the same time with the shoals of fish, he is a favourite with the fishermen as well. So peaceful is his disposition that he allows the common crow-blackbird, or purple grackle, to build his nest in the interstices of the sticks which compose his habitation; and the grackle is said to be fond of availing himself of the privilege. Notwithstanding this gentle disposition, many farmers protect the fish-hawk, under the idea that he acts as a scarecrow to all other birds of prey. A number of fish-

hawks may often be seen congregated on and around a particular tree, making a variety of strange noises, as though engaged in an animated discussion; and, as a nest is almost always built on the same tree very soon after, these gatherings have been called "fish-hawk weddings." They are apparently fond of amusement, often sailing about without any other apparent object, rising to an immense height, and suddenly darting down again. They keep their families most bountifully supplied; and the neighbourhood of the nests often becomes offensive from the number of fish left to decay upon the ground; for, as noticed above, they never descend to pick up what they drop.

But, if the character of the osprey is remarkably good, that of his enemy, the bald eagle, is decidedly the reverse. He not only robs the osprey, and even the turkey buzzard, but he kills lambs and young pigs, destroys poultry, and makes himself generally disagreeable. Hardly any thing in the way of animal food seems to come amiss to him. I have seen a pair of bald eagles sailing over

the marshes on the Kalamazoo River for days together, engaged in catching the large green frogs which abound in that locality. Should he show himself in the neighbourhood of the farm during the breeding-season, he is very likely to be attacked by the little king-bird, or tyrant fly-catcher, who assails him in the most disrespectful manner and often follows him for a mile or more. The eagle seldom offers to defend himself or retaliate upon his persecutors. Like all birds of prey, their attachments are very strong, and the same pair live together till the death of one or both. Should one of them, however, be left in a widowed condition, it loses no time in procuring another mate, who seems in most instances to perform the duty of step-father, or step-mother, with great conscientiousness.

The golden eagle has long been the emblem of courage and strength. Though not so rapid on the wing as the bald eagle, the osprey and some of the hawks, its flight is powerful, majestic and well sustained. It preys upon hares, wild fowl and almost any small animals, but never, I believe, upon fish. When driven to

extremity by hunger, it will sometimes eat carrion, but never seems to do so from choice. It is fond of its mate, and both birds will fight valiantly in defence of their young; but they seem rather unsocial in disposition, two pairs seldom being found in the same neighbourhood. This may perhaps be accounted for by the great quantity of food they require, and the difficulty of obtaining a supply. An Irish peasant once attempted to rob a nest of these birds, situated on an island in the Lake of Killarney. For this purpose he stripped and swam over to the island in the absence of the old birds. He obtained the nestlings; but, unluckily for him, the eagles returned while he was yet up to his chin in the water, and, perceiving what had occurred, they attacked the marauder and killed him. Mr. Nuttall tells this anecdote as illustrative of the furious and savage disposition of the golden eagle; but I think even an ordinarily amiable man might have done the same under like circumstances.

The condor of the Andes has long been celebrated for his flight and his immense size,

which has been greatly exaggerated. One writer gives its wings a spread of eighteen feet, and adds that its great size prevents it from entering the forests. Another declares that it will carry off a man, and gives an account of the way in which the Indians catch it, by making of clay the figure of a man. The bird, striking with his claws, becomes entangled in the sticky material, and is caught without difficulty. In reality, its size does not seem to exceed that of the Bird of Washington. Its claws are comparatively weak, and quite unfitted for perching,—which is the reason that it is never seen upon trees. It makes its nest, or rather lays its eggs, on a bare ledge of rock. The condors in the zoological gardens have laid several eggs, one of which was put under a hen, and hatched after fifty-four days of patient sitting upon the part of the good step-mother. The young condor was covered with dirty white down, except the head, which was naked. It was fed several times a day upon pieces of raw rabbit. The good biddy took all imaginable care of her nestling, leaving it only twice a day for a hasty meal; but,

notwithstanding all this care, the chick lived only three weeks. The kind-hearted hen seemed to be deeply grieved at its loss.

The turkey buzzard, as we have seen, is useful as a scavenger, and is protected by law in many Southern cities. It seems, on the whole, to be a gentle and harmless bird. Mr. Yarrell gives an account of a tame buzzard which was kept in a garden in Uxbridge, England, which took a fancy to build a nest. The master supplied her with proper materials, and gave her two hens' eggs, which she hatched, and brought up the chickens in most approved style. Year after year she raised goodly broods of chickens, taking the best care of them. When meat was given her, she tore it in pieces and put it before her nestlings, but appeared rather annoyed that they should prefer to scratch for themselves.

The smaller hawks seem to equal the eagle in the constancy of their attachment to their mates and their young. Audubon saw a female of the Mississippi kite, alarmed by the report of a gun, take up her young one in her claws and carry it off to a safer place. The attentions

of the sparrow-hawk to his mate and his young have been already mentioned.

All birds of prey are included in the list of forbidden food contained in the fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. In the same book, thirty-second chapter, eleventh verse, is a beautiful allusion to the care of the eagle for her nestlings:—"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him." The eagle is frequently spoken of in the prophecies, where it is used as an emblem of strength and swiftness, and also of pride. These noble birds abound in the ranges of Lebanon, where they find secure resting-places and abundance of food; and the prophets, in their allusions to them, show their usual acuteness in the observation of natural phenomena.

The keenness of sight in birds of prey is well known. For a long time their power of discovering their prey at great distances was attributed to the sense of smell; but very carefully conducted experiments have shown that they possess less of this latter faculty than

many other animals. The sight of the owl is as keen as that of the falcon, but he can exercise it only in a very dim light; whereas all the falcon tribe delight in the full glare of day, and the eagle can look at the sun with impunity. The whole form of the tribe,—their close, thick plumage, protecting them effectually from the extremes of heat and cold,—their powerful talons and sharp beak, often furnished with a cutting tooth in the upper portion or mandible,—and their great strength and rapidity on the wing,—all show a remarkable adaptation to their mode of life, and bear witness to the wisdom of the great Creator.

CHAPTER II.

A STARING BROWN OWL.



oo-hoo! Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!

Jenny, (starting.)

What in the world is that?

Owl. Don't be alarmed, Miss Jenny. It is only me,—calling my husband.

Jenny. And, pray, who are you and who is your husband? And where are you? for I can see nothing.

Owl. Look in the thickest part of the blackberry-bush, towards the ground, and you will see me. You may come as near as you please; for I know you, and am not afraid to trust you.

Jenny. What! Is that you? That pile of

soft, downy feathers, which looks something like a bird's head? Where are your eyes? Oh, now I see them, sure enough; and very large and bright they are. But you don't seem able to keep them open long at a time.

Owl. No: the light is too strong for me just now, and I cannot see very well; but I shall soon get them open, and then my sight is better than most people's, I assure you.

Jenny. But what makes you perk your head and ruffle your feathers in that funny way, as if your neck were out of joint?

Owl. Oh, that is just a habit that we owls have. It is considered very elegant and genteel. When I was a young owl, I used to be thought remarkably graceful in my way of carrying my head; but I don't think so much attention is paid to such things now-a-days.

Jenny. Well, certainly, there is no accounting for tastes. But where is your husband, as you call him?

Owl. I cannot think where he has gone. I am sure I hope nobody has caught him. I told him he was going out too early; but, though he is an excellent husband in most

things, it is surprising how slow he is about taking advice. I believe I must call him again,—if it will not frighten you.

Jenny. Oh, no, not at all! I like to hear you. What do you call the noise you make?

Owl. It is called hooting. Some owls are called screech-owls, from the horrid screeching noise they make. There are different kinds of owls, you know, I suppose.

Jenny. I should like very much to hear about them; but it is rather late, and I must be walking towards home; for mother does not like to have me out after dark,—even in our own pasture.

Owl. I will fly slowly along with you, and then we can talk as we go, and I can be keeping a little look-out for mice and moles. I suppose those wretches, the crows, must be all gone to bed by this time.

Jenny. I should think so, from the quantities of them that I have seen flying over towards the hills for the last hour. But what made you think of that? Don't you like the crows?

Owl. No, indeed. We are old enemies, and

have quarrelled from time immemorial,—so long, indeed, that nobody seems to know how the difficulty began. But that is of no consequence to them,—nor to us either, for that matter. We have causes enough for quarrels; and I don't believe the feud will ever die out so long as there are crows and owls in the world. Just as surely as an owl happens to show himself in the daylight, if there is a crow anywhere within sight or hearing, straightway he calls all his vagabond relations together, and the poor owl is tormented and insulted in all sorts of ways, till he can gain some friendly shelter, or till it is dark enough for him to know what he is about. Then it is time for his pursuers to scatter, and it is a wonder if some of them do not pay for their fun with their lives. Indeed, I once heard of a crow being killed by an owl in broad daylight; and there is a tradition in our family—though I don't vouch for the truth of it—that a falcon was once brought down by an owl in the midst of his flight.

Jenny. I should think that rather a fabulous story. A falcon is a great strong bird,

and flies very high, while you owls are but little creatures.

Owl. To be sure: I know that. I am but seven inches long, and my wings measure only eighteen inches when spread out. But you must not judge all the family by me. Why, the great horned owl, of which there are two or three pairs in this neighbourhood, sometimes measures twenty-six inches in length, and the spread of his wings is great in proportion.

Jenny. Is he the bird the boys call the cat-owl?

Owl. I believe so,—though I think the little screech-owl sometimes goes by the same name. The great horned owl is a very good neighbour, and I have nothing to say against him; but I do think he makes a horrible noise. At one instant he shouts, Waugh-oh! waugh-oh! loud enough to deafen one, and the next makes a noise as though some one were being choked and having his throat cut all at once; and he sometimes ends his performance by screaming and laughing both together.

Jenny. I have heard him, I know. We

were coming home from my uncle's one night after dark, and just as we came to the middle of the woods this gentleman commenced his performances. I was terribly frightened at first, till mother told me that it was only an owl.

Owl. I dare say you were well laughed at for your fears.

Jenny. No, indeed. That is not my mother's way. Father said he did not wonder at my being startled, for it was enough to frighten any one who did not know what it was. But is this musical gentleman the largest of the family?

Owl. Not quite. The great snowy owl of the North sometimes grows larger still. His outspread wings often measure more than five feet from tip to tip. He is a bold fellow, and hunts by day as well as by night,—pursuing hares and rabbits, catching fish, and making great havoc among the small birds as well as among the rats and mice. He does not often come to this part of the country,—though I once met him when I lived in the northern part of New York. We were very sociable

together, and he told me a great deal about his life in the far North, where, you know, they have all their day at one time of the year and all their night at another. That would not suit me very well; but he does not mind it, because he can hunt in the light as well as in the darkness. You would be amused to see him fishing,—standing on a rock or a piece of ice, with the half-frozen water running over his feet and legs every now and then, making a stroke at a fish as it passed him, and seldom missing his aim.

Jenny. I should think his feet would freeze.

Owl. So they would, if they were not well protected. They are not bare, like those of most birds, but covered down to the very toes with warm, hairy feathers, so thick that they make his legs look as large as those of a good-sized dog. He has the most beautiful plumage of any owl I ever saw.

Jenny. What is his colour?

Owl. Very nearly white, but speckled with brown spots and crescents. His face is white, and his eyes are of a brilliant yellow.

Jenny. But you say he hunts in the day-

time. Now, I thought all owls were night-birds.

Owl. Most of them are; but there are several which hunt by day as well; and even my neighbour, the screech-owl, is not afraid to come out by day and seek for food. The snowy owl, as I told you, hunts in the daytime; and he has a cousin, even larger than himself,—the great arctic owl,—which is as bold as any eagle. But, as a general thing, the owls may be called night-birds, since for one that flies by day there are a dozen that come out only at night.

Jenny. How beautifully you fly! You make no more noise than a shadow,—though your wings are so large.

Owl. If you will take the trouble to look closely at my wing, you will see that it is calculated expressly for the silent flight you so much admire. The feathers are very soft and downy, and so arranged at the tips that they divide and let the air pass through them. The largest owls make no more noise than I do; and often the first indication that the hunter has of the presence of the great horned owl is his shadow passing over the snow!

Jenny. You must find this power of silent flight a great convenience in your hunting. But why is it that you cannot see in the day-time?

Owl. Because there is too much light.

Jenny. I thought the more light there was, the better one could see.

Owl. I imagine you never thought much about the matter. Did you never have your eyes so dazzled when looking towards the sun that you could not see at all, unless you shaded them with your hand? And have you not observed how the cat, when she comes from a dark place into a light one, contracts the pupil of her eye so as to let in only a few rays at a time?

Jenny. That is true. I spoke without thought, as you say. But, if you please, I should like to hear all about your eyes. There is nothing I like better than learning how animals are contrived.

Owl. That shows that you are a sensible girl, though you do sometimes speak before you think. If you look at my head, you will observe that I can see straight forward with

both eyes at once, and without turning my head, as most birds are obliged to do. Each eye is placed in the midst of a circle of light-coloured feathers,—something like a lamp in the midst of a reflector. Added to that, we have the faculty of turning our heads almost entirely round without moving our bodies; which is a great convenience. The eyes themselves are so very sensitive to light that we can see perfectly well in what would be thick darkness to any other animal; and it is this sensitiveness which makes the full light of day so very dazzling and distressing to us.

Jenny. Could an owl see if it were perfectly dark?

Owl. No, I suppose not; but that is a thing that very seldom happens,—never out of doors, where there is always more or less light.

Jenny. It appears to me that people make a great mistake when they say, “as blind as an owl.”

Owl. Certainly they do. We may not be able to see as far as the eagle and the hawk family, but our sight is quite as keen at a short distance.

Jenny. And how is it about your hearing?

Owl. That is also very good,—indeed, better than that of most birds. The feathers which cover the ear are so arranged that we can separate them at our pleasure; and the external opening of the ear is quite large. In the stillness of the night there are few sounds that escape us; and that makes me wonder that I should hear nothing of my husband. He must have gone a long way off.

Jenny. Perhaps he is hiding somewhere for fun.

Owl. More likely he has got into some difficulty, and don't want me to know it. I am sure I hope nothing has happened to him; for, though we do have sharp words now and then, I should not know how in the world to live without him. But I dare say he has got back to the nest by this time, and I am only borrowing trouble.

Jenny. What do owls eat?

Owl. Almost any sort of animal food that comes in their way. I catch rats and mice, small snakes, and lizards, when I can find them; also large beetles, and now and then a

bird. And—I am almost afraid to tell you, but—the fact is, I very much relish a tender young chicken or duck now and then.

Jenny. Oh, for shame! I shall not like you at all if you catch my pretty little chickens.

Owl. Don't be alarmed, my dear! I shall never catch *your* chickens, I assure you. But, really, I don't see why it is any worse for owls to eat chickens than for men!

Jenny. Because men have all the trouble of raising and feeding them.

Owl. There is something in that, I admit; but then men eat a great many animals that they neither feed nor protect, such as fish and all wild game. Besides, the farmers might be willing to spare us a chicken now and then, in consideration of the service we do them in catching the mice and moles. Why, when we have young ones, my husband and myself sometimes catch as many as forty mice in a night; and if you think how much mischief even forty mice, with their progeny, would do in a season, you may come to the conclusion that we fairly earn our wages, even if we do pick up a duck or a chicken now and then.

Jenny. That is what my father says; and he will not allow any one to disturb the owls that live in our barn, upon that account. Besides, he says they are rather rare birds in this country. Thompson says they are the same kind that live in old ruined churches and castles in England. He calls them wulls; but his father says they are hoolets.

Owl. Oh, yes: I know them: the little white owls! They are pretty creatures, though I think they are rather silly to pride themselves so much on their gentility just because they have relations abroad who live in castles. For my part, I think my great oak-tree grander and more beautiful than any castle in the world, ruined or not.

Jenny. And so do I. But what does the horned owl eat?

Owl. Pretty much any thing in the way of flesh that comes to his claws. The one who lives near me came home laughing the other night, with a fine fat partridge which he had stolen from some hunters. They had hung it up on a tree while they sat down to supper, and, while they were busy, down he

pounced in his silent way, and was off with their game before they knew it. Then he catches snakes, and does not disdain mice; and frequently, too, he goes fishing, and brings home a good large fish. The snowy owl catches hares, particularly the arctic hare, (which he often hunts in the daytime,) marmots, mice and fish; and he likes to hover about a camp and pick up any spare bits of meat which the hunters throw out to him.

Jenny. Are there many more owls besides those you have mentioned?

Owl. Oh, yes, a number; but there is not much more to be said about them. They are found in all parts of the world. There is one in Australia called the more-pork, because he seems to be always saying those words over and over again. Then there is an owl in Java so bold that it is not afraid to alight on the back of a tiger. I think, however, that the circumstance may be owing not so much to the boldness of the owl as to his blindness. I myself came down on the back of a cow the other night, thinking as much as could be that it was a rock. My husband had a good laugh

at me. Then there is the burrowing owl, of which you have perhaps heard.

Jenny. Burrowing owls? No: I don't think I ever did. What are they?

Owl. They are small day-owls, which, instead of building houses for themselves, live in the burrows of the prairie-dogs or marmots. They are found in South America, and in the great plains at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, where great numbers of these little quadrupeds live together in communities, building a kind of underground city. The owls and the prairie-dogs seem to reside together in great harmony, sometimes even inhabiting the same house; and, what is more curious still, a great many rattlesnakes are found among them, apparently upon very good terms with both dogs and owls! For my part, I think I should have to be reduced to straits before I should consent to live with a rattlesnake.

Jenny. I should think the snakes would bite them.

Owl. They may, perhaps, sometimes; though I suppose you know that the rattlesnake is, after all, rather a peaceable character, who

would rather run away than fight almost any day, and he never bites without giving warning. Still, I don't think I should at all like to live with him.

Jenny. Nor I. But do you think that the burrowing owls make holes for themselves? Or do they only take possession of those that the marmots leave?

Owl. I suspect the latter to be the case,—though they may sometimes burrow if they do not find a hole to suit them. Owls in general take very little trouble about their nests. A hole in a hollow tree, a crevice in the rocks, or a corner in the barn, lined with a few feathers and a little down, answers our purpose well enough. Still, an owl now and then takes a good deal of pains about her nest, and builds it very neatly with crooked sticks and feathers. Some small owls are content with merely scraping a few sticks and leaves together upon the ground. The little red owl likes to live in an orchard, especially if he can find a hollow place in an apple-tree; and he is perfectly happy if he can get into the neighbourhood of a slaughter-house. The great horned owl

builds quite a bulky nest of sticks and hay, lined with feathers, which he places sometimes in a tree, and sometimes in the fissure of a rock ; but he is far from bringing up his young ones in luxury. It is, indeed, the less necessary for young owls to have a soft nest, as they are covered from the first with very thick, warm down, so that they look like little gray powder-puffs, instead of being naked and bare like most young birds.

Jenny. Of course, that makes a difference. Most young birds are forlorn-looking little creatures at first. How long do you have to feed the young owls ?

Owl. For quite a long time, till their feathers are fully grown ; and we provide their food for many days after they are really able to take care of themselves. We owls are very affectionate birds. A pair of owls live together all their days, instead of changing every year, as many of the small birds do ; and the same thing is to be said of all birds of prey.

Jenny. I like them for that.

Owl. Oh, there are a great many good things about them. As for owls—I suppose

you know that the owl was anciently called the bird of wisdom ?

Jenny. Yes, I have heard so. The heathen goddess Minerva used to have an owl. I read the other day how a white owl saved the life of Ghengis Khan, the great prince who founded the Tartar empire.

Owl. How was that ?

Jenny. He happened one day to be surprised and put to flight by his enemies, and was obliged in consequence to hide himself in a thicket of bushes. His enemies pursued him, and were just about to enter the thicket, when one of them happened to observe a white owl perched on the very bush under which the prince was hiding.

They thought, of course, that the bird would never sit so still if there were any one in the place, and so passed on without stopping. The prince escaped ; and after that the Tartars considered the owl a sacred bird, and wore a tuft of owls' feathers on their heads.

Owl. Well, that showed that they knew how to be grateful, at any rate,—though I should have preferred to have them show their gra-

titude in some other way than by wearing owls' feathers. But they may have some other motive than gratitude. There are a great many superstitions connected with owls.

Jenny. I should like to hear about some of them, if you please.

Owl. Well, there is the notion that an owl screeching at the window of a sick-room forebodes the death of the sick person. I suppose more than one invalid has really been frightened out of the world by a little innocent bird, who took a fancy to try his voice in a song, or wanted to call his family about him. The great city of Rome was twice purified throughout with many solemn ceremonies, because an eagle-owl—which is nearly the same as the great horned owl—happened to alight in the city.

The American Indians have many odd notions about them. The little owl, which has a single wailing note, is called by the Crees "the death-bird," and they are accustomed to whistle when they hear it. If the bird remains silent after being thus addressed, the whistler imagines that his death is very near at hand.

Jenny. How silly! Why should they think that the bird knew any thing about the time of their death?

Owl. I do not think I should call them silly so much as ignorant. You know that animals do have powers of providing against the future, which men cannot at all understand,—as you may see in the case of birds which seek shelter before a storm. The Indians, being very much in the habit of observing the motions of animals with a view to find out what the weather is likely to be, might naturally be led to give them credit for greater foresight than they really possess. I have heard that men have some way of telling a long time beforehand when there is going to be an eclipse of the sun or moon. Is that true?

Jenny. Yes, quite true. I do not understand how it is done, but I know it is so; because the eclipses are always put down in the almanac.

Owl. Well, do you not perceive that an Indian, or other ignorant person, seeing that a man was able to foretell an eclipse six months or a year or a hundred years beforehand,

might very easily be led to suppose that the same man could foretell other things as well? Such a conclusion would not be the result of folly, but simply of ignorance.

Jenny. I see that it would. But are there any more superstitions?

Owl. The great horned owl gets his share of honours. The Indian medicine-men, or pow-wows, stuff and prepare the skin of one of these creatures, putting some sparkling beads or buttons in the place of his eyes, after which they sometimes wear it on the head, and sometimes carry it on the arm, where they think it adds much to the dignity and gravity of their appearance. The Indians of the Six Nations treat the bird with great respect, and are much displeased if any one presumes to mimic him. The white hunters, however, only laugh when he comes sweeping down to their camp in the woods, shouting out something which they say sounds like "Who cooks for you all?" They know there is no harm in him, for all the noise he makes, and often throw out to him the remains of their supper. In the north of England, the

children have a story that Pharaoh's daughter was transformed into a white owl; and when they hear it screeching in a winter's night they sing,—

“Oh, ho ! hoo-hoo !
Once I was a king's daughter, and sat on my father's knee !
But now I'm a poor hoolet, and hide in a hollow tree !”

Jenny. Yes, I know. Thompson's father told me that story; and another, about how she used to be an earl's daughter, and was turned into an owl for disobeying her father: so now she goes about in winter's nights, saying, “Oh-hoo-hoo! my feet are cold.” But he says they do not really believe it. It is only a kind of fairy-tale. No human being was ever changed into an owl.

Owl. Of course not. Owls were made owls from the beginning of time, and will always remain so. But I do wonder where my husband is all this time? It is certainly very strange.

Jenny. What is that floating in the brook? Let us go and look at it. Can you see what it is like? It is too dark for my eyes.

Owl. Oh, it is my husband, as sure as you live! He has been trying to catch a fish, and

now he has fallen in and will be drowned! What shall I do? Oh, my poor, dear old bird!

Jenny. Don't be so much disturbed. I think I can get him out. The water is not deep, and I have often waded across here. (Jenny pulls off her shoes and stockings, and, wading into the brook, rescues the owl and sets him up on a bush.) There he is, safe and sound, only pretty well draggled. Poor old fellow! how did you come to tumble into the water?

Owl. A wicked boy threw a stone at me and knocked me down. I never injured him in my life, I am sure; and yet the moment he saw me he tried to kill me!

Jenny. That was very cruel indeed! I hope you are not hurt?

Owl. Not much, thank you, dear child, only cold and wet; but I shall soon get dry in this warm wind, with my good old wife's help. But what is your name, my dear?

First Owl. Why, husband, this is Miss Jenny, that lives at the white house. I have had a very pleasant talk with her,—though I little thought she was going to do me such a ser-

vice. But we will do our best to repay her for it. Not an owl shall come near her chickens or ducklings again, if I have any influence with them. You will have your reward, my dear, you may depend upon that. No one ever yet had reason to be sorry for befriending others.

Jenny. I believe no one ever had reason to be sorry for a kind action. I am only glad that we happened to arrive in time. But I must go into the house now, or mother will think I am lost in good earnest. Good-night to both of you. I hope you will get home in safety and be none the worse for your adventures.

The common little brown owl, as well as the white owl, is easily tamed if taken young. My sister and myself, last summer, had part of the care of three of these important-looking little fellows, which were taken from a nest near a slaughter-house when nearly fledged. They were never very wild, and soon became so tame as to come flapping awkwardly, when called to be fed, and perch upon the hand or

shoulder with evident pleasure, ruffling their feathers and jerking their heads in the comical way usual with them. At the same time, they hissed and snapped their bills angrily at the approach of a stranger, and particularly resented the friendly overtures of the cats, who were much disposed to regard them in the light of play-fellows. They were fed with meat, either raw or cooked, which they took eagerly from the hand, sometimes holding a bit in the claw and tearing it to pieces for themselves, but did not object to a piece of potato or cake now and then. They kept themselves extremely neat, and their plumage was very soft and beautiful.

I wished very much to keep one of them till it was grown up, to observe the changes in the plumage; but we were obliged to resign our charge on leaving town, and the whole family were shortly set at liberty. The white owl is easily tamed, and becomes very familiar. There was no disagreeable scent about these birds; and they were very pretty and amusing pets. It is said that the great horned owl has a very strong and disagreeable odour; and this

may, perhaps, be the case with the others when they feed on carrion.

Sir John Richardson tells a diverting story of a party of Scotch Highlanders who were terribly alarmed in a winter's night encampment by the cries of the great horned owl, which they had never heard before. They had, unwittingly, made their fire of part of an Indian tomb which they had found in the thick pine-grove under which they had taken shelter; and they believed the mournful and discordant sounds which they heard were none other than the moans and shrieks of the injured spirits whose rest they had disturbed!

I am inclined to think that neither the great horned owl nor the little screech-owl is common at present, as I have seldom heard their notes. Wilson compares the note of the latter to the moanings of a half-frozen puppy; and I have heard a very fair imitation of it from a celebrated Italian singer. It is rather ridiculous than terrific; though, heard in a night-encampment in an Indian country, I can imagine that it might be, as Mr. Audubon

remarks, "unpleasantly suggestive." The voice of the hooting owl is not disagreeable when heard at a little distance; and he may easily be drawn into quite a conversation by a skilful imitation of his note. The young owls before mentioned hissed, snapped their bills and made a curious, snoring sound; but I never heard them attempt either to screech or to hoot.

Our great American naturalist gives a very amusing account of the antics of the barred owl, which has often been quoted. The author of the "Birds of Long Island" gives the following anecdote of the same bird, which well illustrates its helplessness in daylight:—

"My friend, G. C. Bell, informs me that when on a collecting-tour in South Carolina, and while intent on looking for the blue-ringed yellow warbler, whose note he had but a moment before heard, he was startled by feeling a sudden pressure upon his gun. Judge of his surprise when he perceived perched upon the barrel the barred owl, which at the same instant discovered its mistake, and, while

endeavouring to retrieve the fatal error, was shot down by the astonished gunner!"

The author of some very interesting papers in one of our magazines, on the day and night owls of North America, relates that he has several times seen the Virginian or great horned owl pursuing his game by daylight, with all the boldness and fleetness of a hawk. The snowy and arctic owls both hunt and fish by daylight; and the writer above mentioned shot a snowy owl on the banks of the Passaic River, which he had watched for a whole winter's day, sailing over the open reaches of water and now and then alighting on the ice.

Nothing can be more perfect than the adaptation of the owl to the life that he is destined to lead. The plumage is thick and downy, and in the case of the arctic owl, as we have seen, the legs are covered to the very claws with thick, hairy feathers, forming a perfect defence against the cold. His large and sensitive eyes are so placed as to make the most of every ray of light and enable him to detect his lurking prey in the deepest night and the darkest shadow; while his powerful claws

are equally adapted to grasping and holding it or to climbing and holding fast to the hollow tree where he often makes his dwelling. The colouring of his plumage is modest and sober, and enables him easily to conceal himself during the day from his numerous enemies; while his power of silent flight enables him to pounce upon his prey unawares.

Owls merit better treatment than they generally receive. It is quite true that they now and then make free with a chicken; and a friend of Mr. Nuttall's saw one pounce down upon a cat which was quietly meditating upon the roof of a smoke-house, and carry her off bodily! Puss, however, had no idea of submitting to any such fate: she scratched and spit furiously, and the owl was glad to come to terms and allow his intended prey to descend to firm ground again! And no shame to him, either; since even an eagle has been not only defeated, but ignominiously brought to the ground, in a similar encounter with a domestic cat!

Still, conceding the point of the fowls and the eggs, the owl does the farmer much more

good than harm. They are far better mousers than the most accomplished cat or terrier. Fifteen or sixteen young rats and mice have been found in the nest of the white owl after the night's repast was finished; and some one who took the trouble to make a computation estimated that a pair of breeding owls brought a mouse to their nest once in twelve minutes all night. They are particularly destructive to moles and field-mice, and the smaller kinds devour quantities of beetles and moths. Let any one estimate the damage done by even a dozen rats and their families in a season, and it will be seen that the owl works quite as much for the advantage as for the detriment of the farmer.

The owl is several times mentioned in Holy Scripture. It occurs in the list of unclean birds in Deuteronomy xiv. 15, 16, and is mentioned in several other places,—almost always as a dweller in ruined cities and deserts,—the emblem of desolation. Job says, “I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls;” and the Psalmist, in the one hundred and second psalm, compares himself to an owl in the desert. In

Isaiah xiii. 21, the owl is spoken of among the dwellers in Babylon. The marginal reading gives "daughters of the owl." The word occurs again in the thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, eleventh and fifteenth verses; but there seems to be some doubt as to the true signification.

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A CROW.



T's only a crow! No matter if he is shot and left, with a broken wing, to die of pain and thirst and starvation. It is only a crow! It is true, he destroys thousands upon thousands of grubs and worms every spring, and that

he drives away the hawks and owls from the farm, and scolds the raccoon and skunk every time they come sneaking after the chickens, till they are glad to clear out again; but never mind that. Shoot every one you can find; put poisoned corn in his way; destroy his nest and kill his little ones; pin him down to the

ground in the hot sun for a scarecrow. No matter what he suffers: he is only a crow!

Jenny. What are you scolding about, Tom?

Crow. Yes: there it is! What am I scolding about? I have no reason to complain, of course! I suppose I wasn't taken from the nest when I was three weeks old, and carried away from all my friends and kindred, to be brought up by boys and half choked by having meat stuffed down my throat when I didn't want it! I didn't have my wings clipped, to prevent my flying away when I got big enough! I don't have my housekeeping, such as it is, disturbed and interfered with every time the broom is used, and my pantry robbed by the cat! Oh, no! And what if I do? I'm only a crow!

Jenny. As to that, I do not think you need complain of the cat. It is "six of one and half a dozen of the other," as Thompson says. Didn't you go the other day, when she was out, and steal her two little blind kittens out of their warm nest? Not content with that, you must needs carry them all round the garden by their tails, till they squalled so loud

that the old cat came running to see what the matter was. I don't wonder that she boxed your ears well for you.

Crow. Where was the harm? She is always dragging the little wretches about by the backs of their necks; and I do not see why their tails are not just as good for a handle,—and better too. I am sure I only meant to do them a kindness by taking them out into the air.

Jenny. And did you mean to do Thompson a kindness when you pulled up all the labels to his flower-seeds and piled them up in little heaps on the walk?

Crow. Of course. They looked much more tidy so than when they were stuck up here and there in the flower-beds.

Jenny. Ah, well, Tom, you will never want an excuse as long as any one cares to accuse you. But, if you don't like your quarters, pray, why don't you fly off to the woods? Your wings are not clipped now, and you can go where you please.

Crow. Much good that would do! The first time I ventured into a corn-field, some one would be shooting at me. And then, I dare

say, my people are all dead by this time. No: on the whole, now I am here, I think I may just as well stay. I have plenty to eat, so far as that goes.

Jenny. Yes, and plenty to steal.

Crow. Well, now, there it is! I should like to know what I ever stole, to have such a fuss made about it?

Jenny. Only mother's thimble, and the lid of the coffee-urn, and the baby's ivory ring, and Eliza's head-dress that she fixed to wear to the party, and my brother's driving-gloves, which you hung up in the top of the tall pear-tree, and a few other little matters. Eh?

Crow. Well, didn't I bring back the thimble and the coverlid? So they are nothing. And the gloves were all full of holes; and—

Jenny. There! that will do! Suppose, instead of making any more complaints or excuses, you should tell me something about your family and friends that you spoke of as all gone.

Crow. Where shall I begin?

Jenny. Where you yourself began,—in the nest. I never saw a crow's nest.

Crow. No: I dare say not. We do not often build near a house, but choose some tree in the thick woods for a breeding-place, where we erect a very substantial dwelling. The outside walls are made of sticks and bark filled in with moss and earth, and the bottom is covered with a very thick and elastic bed, or rather mattress, of horse-hair mixed with cow's hair and a little wool. Here the crow lays her eggs and hatches her young, while her mate roosts on a neighbouring tree, paying her every attention, and watching carefully to see that no enemy comes near to disturb the peace of his family. Not content with that, he is at great pains to bring her such food as she likes, and regularly takes her place when she wishes to go out for a little exercise; and though, as you may have observed, crows are rather fond of talking—

Jenny. Yes, I think I have noticed that.

Crow. — Yet you will never hear them make a particle of noise in the neighbourhood of their nest while they are breeding.

Jenny. That is certainly a great piece of self-denial. What do the young crows feed on?

Crow. Caterpillars, grubs and all sorts of insects; but nothing comes amiss. We are very fond of all kinds of eggs too, and understand how to help ourselves by sticking our bills into them and carrying them off. Why do you look at me in that way?

Jenny. I am thinking I have found out who it is that robs our hens' nests in the barn and carries off the ducks' eggs. I have suspected that the rats did not do all the mischief. For shame, Tom! I am sure you may get enough to eat, without robbing hens' nests,—and *my* hens, too; for you know that I always take your part when you are abused. I should think you would blush to look me in the face.

Crow. Don't you think it is rather unreasonable to expect a crow to blush? But I suppose I may as well own all, since I am caught. It was very wrong, I confess; but you don't know how fond I am of a fresh egg. But pray don't tell of me, Miss Jenny, and I will promise you faithfully not to touch the eggs again,—if I can help it.

Jenny. I won't tell of you this time; but I warn you that Thompson will wring your

neck for you if he catches you; and I shall not take your part as I did in the case of the other things you stole. But go on with your story.

Crow. Where was I? Oh, about feeding the young birds! As soon as we are able to fly, we leave the nest, and accompany our parents upon foraging excursions, keeping together as much as possible, for we are very fond of each others' society. About this time the corn is sprouting from the ground; and I must allow that we do considerable execution in the fields. When the corn just begins to shoot up, it seems to undergo a change, and becomes very sweet and delicious, besides being easy to get at. Of course, the farmer does not like to have all his corn pulled up, and he contrives all sorts of ways to keep us off. Sometimes he dresses up a figure with some of his old clothes, arms it with a gun and sets it up in the middle of his field. We fight shy at first, but soon find out that this kind of man cannot shoot, and care no more about it. Then he puts a boy with a stick; but we know very well that sticks are not guns, either.

Some farmers stretch lines of thread or twine over the fields; and that answers a better purpose,—because we cannot tell that it is not some kind of a snare. It is not easy to shoot many of us, for we always have a sentinel on the look-out, to give timely notice when danger approaches, and the moment he sees a man with a gun he sets up a scream, which puts us on our guard. Some say that crows can smell powder; but that is all nonsense. Sometimes the farmer spreads out corn which has been steeped in poison, and so destroys a great many crows, while his own hens occasionally fall victims as well. I have understood that large rewards have been offered in some places for our destruction. No one thinks of the good we do in destroying insects and vermin,—though we kill millions of them every year. But men are short-sighted creatures: they can see nothing but their present interests.

Jenny. Why, as to that, so long as the crows eat up the corn themselves, I do not see any particular merit in their saving it from the insects. It makes little difference to the

farmer, that I can see, whether his corn is eaten by caterpillars or crows. Do you return to your nest every night, like the eagles?

Crow. No: we care nothing for the nest after the family is raised. We are fond of congregating in great numbers in particular roosting-places; and a little before dark you may see us proceeding in long lines across the fields to our place of repose, each crow as he comes up falling into the ranks like a well-disciplined soldier. Thousands of crows are often collected at these roosting-places, which are sometimes situated in a forest or swamp, and sometimes in a patch of reeds or flags. We are often attacked in these retreats and slaughtered in great numbers. If the roost is a reed-bed, it is set on fire, and the poor crows are destroyed in the flames, or shot down as they hover over their burning homes. In short, every man's hand is against us; and, to hear our enemies talk, you would think that a great mistake had been committed in making crows at all. Now, there is the raven! I don't wonder that people should dislike him, for he is really a nuisance,—though an intelli-

gent bird and rather good looking: yet he has not half as many enemies as the crow.

Jenny. I don't think I ever saw a raven.

Crow. They are not common about here. We are not apt to live very near together. Where you find many crows you will hardly ever see a raven; and, on the contrary, where ravens abound crows are scarce. Yet there is now and then one to be found; and a pair of them built in the rocks on the side of the hill for several years.

Jenny. What is the difference between the raven and the crow?

Crow. The raven is considerably the largest bird; but otherwise they are very much alike. He is rather more fond of meat than we, and though it is true that he does not often attack the corn, he is guilty of a still meaner theft, for he kills young lambs and sickly sheep, as well as chickens and ducks. Besides these domestic animals, he destroys great numbers of mice, moles, snakes and frogs, and will even watch a fox burrow, as perseveringly as a cat watches a mouse-hole, and kill the young foxes when they come out. He is a great thief, and fond

of collecting all sorts of curiosities, especially such as are gay-coloured or shining. I have noticed that some men have the same fancy; for when I was in your uncle's library the other day, I observed that all one side of the room was covered with glass cases filled with little bits of stone and metal, stuffed birds' skins, and even old bones and teeth.

Jenny. My uncle will tell you about those things better than I can. But what sort of nest does the raven build?

Crow. Very much like our's, except that he generally prefers rocks and high banks to trees. They go back to the same nest year after year, and are very skilful in repairing it. The female lays five or six eggs, of a bluish-green colour spotted with brown, and sits upon them twenty days, during which time her mate not only provides her with as much as she wants to eat, but lays up a supply against a wet day. In fact, none of our family are content to live in the claw-to-bill fashion of the smaller birds; and even the blue jays put away seeds and nuts against the time of need. After the young ravens are hatched, they are well

taken care of; and their mother teaches them to keep perfectly still while she is away, that they may neither fall off the rock nor be discovered and carried off by the hawks and falcons, or by the mischievous boys, who would think themselves killed if they had to do a day's hard work, but do not at all mind risking life and limb to rob a raven's nest. They feed their young longer than most birds, and, as they raise but one brood in the year, the family keep together all summer, coming out together in the morning and returning at night to their nest. Indeed, all our tribe are remarkable for their affectionate disposition. If a crow chances to lose his wife while he has a young family, he goes off and finds another, who immediately takes the place of the mother-bird and performs all her duties with as much care and solicitude as if the young birds were her own; and the same is true of a widowed crow. Oh, we have a deal of good in us,—we crows have,—notwithstanding all our enemies say of us.

Jenny. Indeed, I think so too! I have heard a good deal about the rooks and rookeries in

England. I suppose rooks are related to you.

Crow. Yes: we call them cousins. They have much better times than we have. They build in the parks and avenues belonging to gentlemen's houses, and their colonies are considered quite ornamental. People there know how to value the services of the rook in destroying the cut-worm; and he follows the plough almost as tamely and familiarly as a hen. The jackdaw, which is a smaller species, often builds round the battlements and towers of cathedrals and abbeys, where no one molests him. He is a good friend to the rook, and the two are often in company. Ravens are abundant in some parts of Great Britain, as well as carrion-crows and magpies.

Jenny. Magpies! What are they?

Crow. They are beautiful birds, with black and white plumage,—the black being glossed with brilliant blue and green reflections,—and very long tails, which they jerk about in a very jaunty and affected manner. They are intelligent creatures, but very thievish, stealing every thing they can lay their bills on. A

magpie's nest is a very elegant contrivance, being built of thorny sticks, and ingeniously arched over, having only a hole just large enough for the entrance of the bird: so that no one can rob a magpie's nest without getting well scratched for his pains. Magpies are very familiar, living and building around the farm-house and barn-yard, while at the same time they are so watchful and suspicious that it is by no means easy to catch one.

Jenny. Are they found in this country?

Crow. Not in the Eastern States; but they are very abundant at the far West; and in California there is a species with yellow legs and bill. There is a kind of crow in Cornwall, called a chough, (pronounced chuff,) which has red legs and bill and is much admired for his beauty.

Jenny. You mentioned the blue jay. Is he a relative of your's?

Crow. He is usually considered so; and I think there is a good deal of family resemblance,—though it is more in habits and actions than in appearance.

Jenny. I think the blue jay is a beautiful bird.

Crow. Yes, he is really a fine-looking fellow. I don't know any bird with more elegant plumage; and the crest on his head adds much to the smartness of his appearance. The blue of his wings and tail has a peculiar softness and brilliancy, which is very well set off by the velvety black bands which cross it. His motions, too, are alert and graceful, particularly in the breeding-season; and he is an excellent husband and father. His voice, however, does not at all correspond to his personal appearance, for it is any thing but melodious.

Jenny. And what about his manners?

Crow. I never knew that he had any. The truth is, that, though friendly enough to his own kind, he is a perfect pest to all the smaller birds, plundering and destroying their nests, sucking their eggs and killing their young ones. Thus the appearance of a blue jay in the grove or garden creates a great disturbance among the small fry, and they often join together to drive him away. He hates

the owl as much as we do, and always joins to persecute one of the stupid creatures when it makes its appearance in daylight. But his great pleasure is to plague and insult the sparrow-hawk. No sooner does he see one of these birds sailing along, than he imitates his cry, which he can do very perfectly, and the next moment squeals out piteously, as if he were caught. This brings all the jays out in a body, and they fly around and over the sparrow-hawk, now mimicking him, and now pretending to be half killed! Generally, the sparrow-hawk pursues his way in dignified contempt, but now and then he gets vexed at their clamour, and, singling out one of the most impudent of them, dashes after him, and there is soon an end of his frolic. Then what a screaming and screeching is set up by his mates! You would think all the injured innocence in the world was in one place; whereas it is all their own fault.

Jenny. I suppose the jay, like your people, eats all sorts of things. I have often seen him in the cherry-trees.

Crow. Yes: nothing comes amiss to him.

Cherries, pears and apples he likes equally well; and I have seen him carry off many a fine harvest-pear, as he steals an egg, by sticking his bill into it. He cracks walnuts and acorns, opens beech-nuts and chestnuts, splits open Indian corn, and does not need to be in a starving condition to devour young chickens and turkeys!

Jenny. After all his fine plumage, I do not think I like him as well as the crow,—though I must confess that he is a great ornament to the woods. But I want to ask you whether the crow-blackbird is a relation of your's.

Crow. Why, no,—not exactly; though we are very good friends, and very much alike in many of our habits, and we are bound together by our common sufferings; for he is as much persecuted as we are, and for the same reasons.

Jenny. I think he is an amusing fellow. I never can go under the tree where he sits but he spreads out his tail, opens his wings, and says something in the blackbird language which sounds as though it would be very impertinent if one only understood it! He seems very fond of hearing himself talk.

Crow. Yes, he is indeed. I must confess that in some parts of the country the farmers have great reason to complain of them. In the first place, they are as fond of the sprouting grain as ourselves, and no sooner does the pale-green blade appear above ground than down comes the crow-blackbird, or purple grackle, as he is more properly called, and makes great havoc in the field, —pulling up the corn, scattering the blades around, and talking and strutting all the time as though engaged in the most praiseworthy action in the world! If it should be a favourable season, the corn is soon grown up out of their way, and they leave it in peace for a time. It shoots up and grows, and in due time the ears are ready for roasting. Then down comes the crow-blackbird again, with all his friends and neighbours, cackling and strutting, as he pulls off the green husks, and striking his bill into the milky kernels with great delight. After he has eaten all he can possibly swallow, he flies off to his nest with his bill well filled for his young ones. He destroys not only what he eats, but a great

deal more; for the soft ears, deprived of their envelopes, shrivel up and are spoiled. Troops of red-winged blackbirds assist in the work of destruction, and it is no wonder if the farmer shoots down as many as possible; for, if undisturbed, they would not leave a single sound ear of corn in the field. The red-wings are as bad as the grackles, and even worse in some places, especially in the lowlands near the sea.

Jenny. They are very handsome birds. Their scarlet epaulets contrast beautifully with their black plumage, and their form is so elegant and graceful that no one can help admiring them.

Crow. You might admire them still more if you should happen to come across their nest and see how courageously the male defends it from intruders, and how careful he is to supply the young birds with food.

Jenny. Where do they usually build?

Crow. In damp, swampy places, among the reeds or low bushes,—from which circumstance they take one of their popular names of swamp-blackbird. They lay from four to six light-

blue eggs, and raise two broods in a season. Late in the year they associate together in immense flocks, and often, in company with the crow-blackbird, move towards the South, travelling during the day, and selecting some commodious roosting-place for the night's repose,—generally a bed of reeds or flags, where they rest during the hours of darkness. In the course of these journeys, and indeed at all times, great numbers are destroyed by the different species of hawk. But I leave the blackbirds. I have a relative in Australia, whose acquaintance you would be delighted to make, and, though I have never seen him, I can give you some interesting facts in relation to him. He is called the satin bower-bird.

Jenny. What a pretty name! Does he live in bowers?

Crow. No: but he builds them; and very ingenious works they are. The little architects first construct a platform, rather arched in the middle, of twigs and sticks; and upon this foundation they erect their bower, which is also formed of long, slender twigs, with their

tops bent together and interlaced. The forks of the twigs are always placed outward, so that the inner walls are smooth and even. It is then lined with long grass, also meeting at the top, and is kept in place at the bottom with little stones. The assembly-room being thus finished, they proceed to furnish and decorate it by collecting all sorts of curious and pretty objects,—such as gay-coloured feathers, bits of cloth, smooth and white pebbles, scraps of metal, shells, and the skulls of small animals, especially such as have been bleached in the sun. These are arranged in various ways, and often altered to suit the fancies of the little builders, who seem to take endless pleasure in arranging and adding to their store of curiosities.

Jenny. What cunning little birds! But do they use these bowers for nests?

Crow. No: they are merely playing-places, where the bower-birds assemble to enjoy each others' society and to divert themselves. Hence we call it the “assembly-room.” A number of the birds are almost always to be seen in or near the bowers, amusing themselves

with conversation, with running races, (an exercise of which they are very fond,) or in arranging and adding to their cabinets of curiosities. These pretty bowers are about three feet in length.

Jenny. How much I should like to see them! I suppose they must be very pretty birds, if I may judge from their name.

Crow. There are two or three different sorts of them. The plumage of the satin bower-bird is deep satiny blue-black, all but the larger feathers, which are velvety jet black. The eyes are blue, with a circle of red around the pupil, and the bill is bluish, changing into yellow at the top. The head and body of the female are reddish green; the wings and tail light brown. The spotted bower-bird is much more gayly dressed. His ears, throat and head are brown, except the crown of the head, which is silver-gray. The back of the neck has a broad band of rosy pink feathers, which are lengthened out so as to form a kind of crest. The rest of the upper surfaces of his feathers are deep brown, every feather having a spot of buff at the end; and the wing and

tail feathers are tipped with dusky white or buff colours.

Jenny. Pretty creatures! But what about the cow-blackbird or cow-bird? Is he your cousin too?

Crow. No, indeed! I hope not! If there is a bird upon the face of the earth that I utterly despise, it is the cow-blackbird. I would rather be cousin to an owl. I hate the owls, with their great goggle eyes and their sanctimonious, would-be-wise airs; but I would rather be an owl than a cow-blackbird any day.

Jenny. But why? What is there so very bad about them?

Crow. In the first place, they are not content to change mates every year, like the little birds,—which is bad enough,—but they change ever so many times in a season; and not only that, but they go about laying their eggs in the nests of the little birds, for them to hatch and bring up, never taking the least care of their families themselves.

Jenny. What a shame! But that explains something which has puzzled me very much. There is a yellow-bird's nest in the cedar

hedge, which I have been to look at every day since it was built. After the yellow-bird had laid three eggs, another egg appeared in the nest, quite different from the rest, and somewhat larger. This egg was hatched two or three days before the others; and when I went to look at them yesterday, none of the yellow-bird's eggs were to be seen, and the old birds seemed to have all they could do to feed this one nestling, which appears almost as large as they are already. I asked Thompson about it, and he said it was a young cat-bird.

Crow. That is a mistake, and a great slander upon the cat-bird, who is a good-hearted, honest fellow and very fond of his family. No! the female cat-bird would scorn to do such a thing. She makes her own nest, and sits on her own eggs, even when the nest has been removed from one place to another; and she and her mate will even bring up the deserted young of other species of birds if thrown in their way. I presume the nestling you mention is a young cow-blackbird; and the silly, kind-hearted little yellow-birds will bring it up as their own. If the small birds would take my advice, I would

counsel them to destroy every cow-bird's egg they find in their nests. That would put an end to the practice, I should think; or at least it would save them the trouble of rearing the little wretches.

Jenny. How does the cow-bird look? I don't know that I ever saw one.

Crow. His head and neck are of a sooty-brown colour, and the rest of his body is black with green reflections. His colours are rather dull, and he is not so elegant in his motions as are many of the others. You need not wonder, after what I have told you, that we do not feel very proud of the family, nor care much to claim relationship with them.

Jenny. No, indeed, I do not. But I am glad to learn that it is not the cat-bird who is the intruder, for he has always been a favourite of mine. Well, we have had a good, long talk, and I feel that I have learned a great deal!

Crow. Then you won't tell of the hens' eggs, will you?

Jenny. If you will promise not to steal any more. (*Exit Jenny.*)

Crow. There goes the cat. I dare say she has been robbing my pantry. After all, I have rather good times here, though I am only a crow.

A tame crow is one of the most amusing pets in the world, but at the same time he is rather mischievous. A crow in the possession of one of our neighbours actually attempted, in the absence of the cat, to act as nurse to the kittens in the manner above described. He was evidently much disconcerted by his want of success; and, laying the squalling nurslings down, he would caress them with his bill, at the same time attempting to soothe them with all the tender tones and epithets which the crow language could afford. The return of the old cat put an abrupt end to his experiments; and, as though disgusted with the result of them, he never touched the kittens again till they were old enough for playmates.

Another crow with which I was very well acquainted was taken from the nest when quite young, and became as tame as a dog, showing a great deal of intelligence. His

mistress was a most accomplished and industrious seamstress, and Tom's favourite piece of revenge, when he felt himself neglected, was to steal her thimble. Knowing his habits, she took no notice of the theft, and he would invariably return it after a time, laying it down and hopping away with an air of the most innocent unconcern. Tom was a welcome guest at our house, and made himself very much at home, going and coming at his own pleasure. He had two cabinets of curiosities, one on the top of the piazza and the other in the garden; and he spent much time in arranging his affairs,—house-keeping, as the children called it. Any small article missed from the house was generally to be found in one or other of these repositories. Another of his amusements consisted in covering the tops of all the flower-pots with small white or light-gray pebbles, all of a size. He took great pains in selecting these pebbles from the gravel walks, and arranged them very neatly and tastefully in patterns. I used sometimes mischievously to disturb this fancy work of his,—in which case, after giving me

a severe scolding, he would immediately set to work and restore it to its former condition.

Tom and the cat, though very polite to each other, lived in a state of perpetual enmity and mutual annoyance. They were both abundantly fed, and Tom invariably buried part of his meat; while puss, watching to see where he deposited it, would just as invariably dig it up and hide it. Tom, on discovering the theft, immediately set off to seek puss, and a comical scene ensued. Tom walked round and round, bowing, spreading out his wings and tail, and talking in a strange language; all the time watching for an unguarded moment to make a snap at his adversary's tail. Puss, on her part, was fully on her guard, kept her tail close, and turned as fast as he did, invariably in the greatest good humour. After this had gone on for a while, she would sometimes be gracious enough to restore her plunder, and they parted the best of friends; but more commonly Tom would institute a search for his treasure, which he generally recovered, sooner or later, and buried in some new place of concealment. We

had two or three dogs, which generally treated him with civil contempt; though the youngest of them would now and then condescend to play with him.

Tom was sometimes punished for his transgressions,—after which he always sulked for a long time, sitting aloof on the corner of the wood-house over the door, and scolding every one who went out or came in. He was generally left to the enjoyment of his ill humour till he came round of himself; but if his company were desired it was only necessary to show him a basin of clean water, when he would come down in great haste, making the most amiable speeches, to enjoy the luxury of a bath. I do not know that any attempt was ever made to teach him to speak; but I incline to think that, with perseverance, it might have been accomplished. In his own tongue he was eloquent; and while listening to one of his harangues it was difficult to resist the impression that he made use of a definite and well-formed language. Poor Tom was finally shot by an ill-tempered man who had been offended by one of his favourite tricks,

—that of alighting suddenly on the head of a passer-by and screaming into his ear.

Mr. Audubon, who seems to think it a sin to kill any bird except for the purpose of painting him first and stuffing him afterwards, takes the part of the “pensive and oppressed crow,” as he calls him, with his usual delightful enthusiasm, and really makes out a pretty strong case for him; but it must be confessed that farmers find it difficult to appreciate his good qualities while he is pulling up their corn at the rate of an acre or two a day. Numerous schemes have been adopted for the prevention of the mischief, with varying success; and I have lately heard of soaking the seed-corn in some compound which is distasteful to the crow, who, after several experiments, abandons the unsavoury food in disgust. Before the use of steel pens became universal, crow quills were much in request for the finer kinds of writing and drawing.

The crow is not a favourite with any of the smaller birds, whose eggs he steals, besides occasionally eating their young ones. The golden oriole seems to have a special aversion

to him. We always had several families of these splendid birds inhabiting our locust and elm trees; and we used sometimes to amuse ourselves by setting Tom up in a cherry-tree and engaging him in conversation. A great agitation would immediately be observable among the orioles, who assembled from every quarter, talking and scolding in their native tongue,—a compliment which Tom never failed to return in his. I have seen as many as twenty or thirty at one time assembled, and making a splendid show. They never offered to assault him, nor did he ever interfere with them.

The dislike of the crow to the owl is well known, and a skilful person may bring them together in great numbers by imitating the notes of the latter bird.

The crow-blackbird, or purple grackle, is as bad as the crow in his assaults on the corn-fields, though he does not seem to be quite so thievishly inclined in other respects. He is even more free and impudent in his manners, and never fails to accost the passing traveller with what sounds like very disrespectful epi-

thets delivered with an exaggerated mock politeness which is really provoking. At times their notes are quite musical. They are fond of following the plough, which they do with an elevated step and an air of great dignity and consequence, destroying immense numbers of grubs, cut-worms and other insects, thus rendering a real service to the farmer, whom they afterwards plunder so unmercifully.

The red-winged blackbird is not sufficiently common in the Middle States to do any considerable damage; but in the Eastern States he seems to bear fully as bad a character as either the crow or the grackle, and even Audubon, the general bird-apologist, admits that it is well deserved. He is certainly a beautiful bird so far as plumage goes, and as a family bird he seems to be exemplary, taking the utmost care of his wife and children. This amiable trait seems, indeed, to characterize most of the family, except the boat-tailed grackle of the Southern States, which never comes near the female while she is rearing her young.

The satin bower-bird of Australia seems to be one of the most interesting of the family. For a long time it was supposed that the bowers or playing-places mentioned above were the work of a quadruped, till Dr. Gould, who has given the world so much that is interesting on the subject of birds, cleared up the mystery. By patient watching, he was enabled to see the bower in the process of construction. A number of birds meet together for the labour, and the bowers are repaired from time to time: so that they last for a long while. Mr. Broderip, in his delightful "Leaves from the Note-Book of a Naturalist," gives a very animated description of the manners of a pair of satin bower-birds which inhabit the Zoological Gardens of London, where they have a bower in which they take great delight.

The raven is mentioned several times in Scripture,—always as an unclean bird, inhabiting desolate places. The feeding of the young ravens is mentioned by the Psalmist as illustrating the watchful providence of God for his creatures. Every child knows the story of

Elijah's ravens. Indeed, one would expect to find many ravens in Palestine, where they would choose convenient nesting-places in the rocky hill-sides; and a gentleman who has travelled much in the Holy Land, Mr. Talbot, told us that the only living things, besides his own party, which he saw near the Dead Sea, were a pair of ravens.

CHAPTER IV.

FLY-CATCHERS.



MISS JENNY, have you seen the martins this year?

Jenny. No: I did not know they had come. But what will they do for a house? The blue-birds have taken possession of the martin-box; and I don't believe the martins will

be able to turn them out.

Thompson. Not they! They tried it last year, and the bluebirds were quite too much for them; but I have made a new house for the martins, and put it up on the wood-house, and they are all hovering round it as busy as bees in swarming-time. They seem to like it even better than the old one.

Martin. Of course we do. Who would not like such a nice, new, airy place better than a leaky old box full of fleas? It may do very well for bluebirds, however; and I am sure they are welcome to it. Moreover, there is a great deal more space in this one. I should say there was room for twice as many nests. It is very pleasant to have all one's family settled just around one.

Jenny. That is one thing I like about you martins. You are such sociable birds.

Martin. Yes; and you will find the same disposition running through almost all our family. We are fond of assembling in great numbers, not only in travelling-time, but also to build our nests and take care of our young ones. We think it a much pleasanter way of managing than for each pair of birds to sit sulking by themselves.

King-bird. What is that you say about "birds sulking by themselves"?

Martin. Oh, good-morning, cousin king-bird. I did not know that you had returned.

King-bird. Yes, indeed. I have been back

more than a week. My nest is all done, and my mate has laid two eggs already.

Martin. Where have you built this year?

King-bird, (suspiciously.) What is that to you, pray?

Martin. No offence, cousin. I only asked a civil question. I didn't know that you cared any thing about keeping the matter secret. You know how natural it is to judge others by ourselves; and, for my own part, I should not care if all the world knew where I lived.

King-bird. A good reason why,—because no one ever meddles with you. By your leave, I will keep the place of my nest to myself. But how is this? You seem to have been provided with a new house since last year.

Martin. Yes: the bluebirds plagued us so that Thompson, the gardener, made us this new box,—which, as you see, is much better than the old one. Was it not kind in him?

King-bird. Oh, yes, I dare say,—if you choose to put yourself under such obligations; but as long as I have a bill and claws of my own I don't mean to be beholden to any one for a house.

Jenny. I think, Mr. King-bird, I have seen you before. Did you not live just in the edge of the orchard last summer?

King-bird. Yes, to be sure, child! How did you know it?

Jenny. I saw your nest in the branch of the great sweet-apple-tree, and climbed up to look at it. Then I showed it to Thompson, and he said it was a king-bird's nest; and afterwards I saw you playing about it and catching flies.

King-bird. Well, to be sure! If I had known that, I should not have had an easy moment. I wonder the man did not pull the nest down.

Jenny. For what reason should you think he would pull it down?

King-bird. Why, most farmers and gardeners have a great spite against us, because we now and then eat a honey-bee,—just as though we did not destroy twenty mischievous insects for one harmless one.

Jenny. That was just what Thompson said; and, besides, he thinks you only eat the drones.

King-bird. We eat only one kind; but I don't

know what you call them. I don't see why men should resent our eating a bee now and then, when thousands of bees are smoked to death every fall. But that is the way with them: they care for nobody but themselves.

Martin. I do not think that trait is entirely confined to men, however. Have you seen the phebe-bird this spring?

King-bird. Oh, yes! There she is, just as usual,—poor, meek-spirited little thing, poked away under the darkest corner of the cow-house, at work at her nest; while her mate is making as much fuss over her as though she were the handsomest bird in the whole world!

Martin. I am sure it is a good thing if he thinks so. After all, she is a pretty little creature, and a very good hunter too, for a fly-catcher! Now, you need not bristle up and look as though you meant to swallow me. You know very well that I am not afraid of you, though I have really no time to quarrel this morning. It would be much better for you to go and look after the safety of your mate; for I heard the old cat saying that she

meant to take her two kittens out hunting in the orchard in an hour or two.

King-bird. If they dare to come near my nest, I will peck their eyes out! (*Flies off in great haste.*)

Martin. There goes one of the choicest fellows in the world, if he were not such a fire-eater; but he is so ready to take offence that he is really very disagreeable sometimes. He and I get on pretty well, as we have tried our strength together before now, and he knows that I am more than a match for him; but all the other birds detest him; and really I don't wonder at it.

Jenny. He seems quite to look down upon the phebe-bird; and yet they are very much alike, both in appearance and actions.

Martin. She is every bit as good as he, only not so quarrelsome, and they are own cousins; whereas he and myself are very distantly related, if at all. They both gain their living in the same way,—by catching flies, which they do mostly on the wing. You may sometimes see the king-bird skimming low over the meadow, like a hawk hunting for game. He

is then looking for grasshoppers, of which he eats a great many. Sometimes he flies backward and forward over a piece of water, hunting flies; and at such times he is very fond of dipping and washing like a swallow. The phebe-bird is not so strong on the wing, and generally prefers to take her stand upon the top of a fence or of some tall weed, where she watches for passing insects, which she pursues and catches with great adroitness. She may now and then be seen fluttering about the eaves of the house, picking the spiders out of their webs; and she has no objection to an occasional bee.

Jenny. Where does the phebe-bird build?

Martin. Generally under the roof of an out-house or in the shelter of some overhanging rock; and she is particularly fond of the entrance to a cave. I have known her place her nest some distance down an old well; and great numbers of them breed about the Natural Bridge of Virginia, of which I dare say you have heard. The outside of the nest is formed of mud and clay, which the birds collect in small balls, sometimes mixing a little

moss to give firmness to the other materials. It is lined with small, slender roots and grass, and sometimes a few feathers, and is really a very pretty fabric,—though it does not compare in ingenuity with those of some of my own family,—that of the republican swallow, for instance, or even that of the chimney-swallow, which last, however, is more beautiful than comfortable.

Jenny. I should like to hear about some of these swallows; but first, if you please, tell me about your own nest and eggs; for I have never seen them.

Martin. With great pleasure, my dear,—though there is really not much to tell. You know we always take possession of a martin-box if we can find one. The negroes at the South hang up calabashes for us,—which we find very convenient; and we do not object to an old hat nailed up on the side of a cabin. Even the Indians, poor fellows! like to have us about them; and they will sometimes cut off all the twigs and small branches of a sapling, leaving only the larger limbs, on each of which they hang a calabash. That suits us very

well; and in return for the kindness we watch over the beef and venison which they hang up to dry, and keep the hawks and buzzards away from it. When no such accommodation is at hand, a hole in the wall, or a crevice in the rock, serves our turn very well; though we never, if we can help it, go far from the dwellings of man. The nest itself is formed of dry twigs, grass and roots, and lined with whatever material is most convenient,—fine grass, rags, or a few feathers. We often use the same nest for two or three years in succession, cleaning and repairing it every spring, and also after the flight of the first brood; for we raise two broods in the same summer. The number of our eggs is from four to six. They are pure white, without spots. The male and female take turns in sitting, and are very attentive in supplying each other with food. As you remarked, we are very social in our disposition, and three or four pairs often occupy the same box. As soon as our first brood are able to shift for themselves, we make preparations for another: so that we have always plenty to do.

Jenny. I suppose that is the reason you rise so early. I hear you twittering sometimes before it is light enough to see.

Martin. Yes: we wake very early, and usually indulge in a short song just at dawn, though we do not stir from home till broad daylight. We retire to rest about sunset; and in that we are different from the chimney-swallows, who often keep on the wing till nearly midnight, and are stirring with the very first peep of light in the morning.

Jenny. See there! What is that large bird hovering over the barnyard? I am afraid it is a hawk, looking for my chickens.

Martin. A hawk! A hawk! Martins! Swallows! A hawk! Halloo, king-bird! there's a hawk!

(Flock of martins, swallows and king-birds, assembling.) A hawk! a hawk! Chase him! Peck him! Scratch his eyes out! Pull his feathers off! Bite him! Away, you villain! Thieves! robbers! murder! &c. *(They drive him away, and, after pursuing him to some distance, the martin returns, accompanied by a barn-swallow.)*

Martin. Dear me! I am quite out of breath!

I believe I have not yet recovered from the fatigues of my journey.

Swallow. That is the first hawk I have seen this year. He will not be back here very soon, I fancy. We have saved your chickens for you this time, Miss Jenny.

Jenny. I am sure I am very much obliged to you. Do you always go after a hawk in that way?

Martin. Always; and not after the hawk alone. Not a crow, owl or turkey-buzzard dares come about the farm if there are martins and king-birds in the neighbourhood. If the king-bird now and then does eat a honey-bee, he pays for the dainty many times over, in the chickens and ducklings he saves,—to say nothing of the eggs; for I suppose you know that crows will suck eggs.

Swallow. You ought to know it, for your tame crow, Tom, sucks plenty of them. I see him flying into the barn through the stable-window, and hunting about the hay-mow for the nests, almost every morning.

Jenny. The scamp! He promised me faithfully that he would never touch another.

Swallow. You must be credulous indeed, Miss Jenny, to take the word of a crow. The only way to keep him from the hens' nests will be to shut him up.

Jenny. Indeed, I am afraid it is so. But how did you happen to see him?

Swallow. Very easily, because I live in the barn. I am a barn-swallow, you know. Yonder is the chimney-swallow flying round that dead tree and breaking off twigs for his nest.

Jenny. So that is what takes him about it so much. I have often wondered what the attraction could be. But I thought that swallows' nests were generally built of mud.

Swallow. Mine are built of mud, and so are those of the republican or cliff swallow; but the chimney-swallow makes hers of little twigs, which she glues together by means of a sticky substance with which nature has provided her. The nest is shaped somewhat like the half of a shallow tea-cup, and is glued fast to the side of the chimney with the same cement. The whole affair is very frail, and often gives way, especially after a heavy rain: so that it is no unusual event for both nest and young

to go tumbling down the chimney. But that is not so great a misfortune to them as it would be to some other birds; for the little things can use their claws very skilfully, even before their eyes are open, and they soon climb to the top of the chimney, where their parents take care of them.

Jenny. They must be cunning little birds.

Barn-Swallow. Yes: they are very forward. Even when nothing happens to disturb them, they often leave the nest long before they can fly,—perhaps because they do not find it very comfortable; for the chimney-swallow never puts a particle of lining in her nest.

Jenny. Even if she did, I should not think they would find it very pleasant living in a dark, smoky chimney.

Barn-Swallow. Why, I don't know. Of course they never build in a chimney which is in use. It is very safe and cool; and as for the darkness, the young ones are blind for a long time: so that does not much matter. As soon as they are able, they fly abroad with their parents, who often feed them in the air. In fact, they live on the wing more than almost any

other bird; and they can hardly walk on the ground at all.

Jenny. I have often wondered what chimney-swallows used to do before there were any chimneys for them to build in.

Barn-Swallow. I suppose they made use of hollow trees,—as they do now to some extent, especially to roost in after they quit their nests. The sycamore is a great favourite with them, as it is often hollow from top to bottom. I have seen thirty or forty nests in one such tree; and I know of an old sycamore-tree in Kentucky to which as many as eight or nine thousand swallows resort for a sleeping-place every night. You look as if you thought I was telling a large story; but it is quite true. It was from seeing the great number of birds which hover around these trees at nightfall that the notion arose of their spending the winter in such places. But, to return to what we were saying, of course there was an abundance of such trees when the country was unsettled, and the swallows built in them. But when white men came they built chimneys; and probably some pair of adventurous young

birds, looking out for a situation, thought they would try the experiment of setting up house-keeping in a chimney.

Martin. I dare say their friends thought them very foolish, and had a great deal to say about the folly of young people believing themselves wiser than their elders.

Barn-Swallow. Very probably; but, as the adventurers succeeded, their example was followed by others; and now nothing is more common than to see swallows building in chimneys. My own family have changed their habits in the same way. Of course there were swallows long before there were barns; but when barns came to be built, the swallows saw the advantages of such warm, airy and sheltered situations and took possession of them. In Europe my relations live much in old ruined castles and churches.

Martin. It seems they have the advantage of you, since they live in castles, while you only inhabit barns.

Barn-Swallow. That is a matter of taste. Now, I like to see things improving about me. It distresses me to see any thing falling into

decay and destruction; and for that reason I would rather inhabit a good substantial barn than an old ruined castle.

Jenny. That is something like what my uncle said when he came home from Italy. He said he thought the old ruins very beautiful and interesting at first, and could never be satisfied with exploring and studying them, but after a while he grew tired of seeing every thing going to decay and nothing improving, and felt as though he would give them all for the sight of a new barn.

Barn-Swallow. I have had that feeling myself when I was travelling in Mexico and South America, where I have seen the grand old Spanish churches and convents all crumbling to ruin. Pleasant as that climate is, I am always glad to get back to the United States, where things are thriving and prosperous. It looks as though people were wide awake and knew how to help themselves.

Jenny. You return to the North pretty early, don't you?

Barn-Swallow. Yes; by the beginning of May, or, in mild seasons, even by the middle of April.

Sometimes we start too soon, and have to return again: hence the old saying, that one swallow does not make a summer. As soon as we are rested from the fatigues of our long journey, we begin to build our nest,—which is quite a piece of work. The first thing, of course, is to fix on a situation, which is soon chosen,—sometimes in a barn or shed, sometimes under the eaves of a house. I observe this spring that several pairs of young birds have taken up their abode in the belfry of the church,—which is a very good place, if they do not mind the noise of the bell.

Jenny, (to herself.) That puts me in mind of a verse in the Psalm which was read in church yesterday:—“Yea, the sparrow has found her a house, and the swallow a nest, where she may lay her young; even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God.” It is in the eighty-fourth Psalm. (*To the bird.*) But after you have found a place, what then?

Barn-Swallow. Then we build a nest.

Jenny. But how? Tell me all about it, if you please.

Barn-Swallow. Oh, what a curious little

girl! But I like to talk with young people when they are modest and sensible: so I will describe the process as well as I know how. When a pair of swallows have settled all to their satisfaction, they resort to the nearest pond or stream, where they make some small balls of mud or earth mixed with long grasses, which they stick against the side of the wall, beam or rock upon which they have resolved to build. As soon as one row is completed, they begin another on the top of it, making each row longer than the last: so that the nest is like half of a hollow cone, placed with the point downwards. They work early in the morning and till dark in the evening, but suspend operations in the middle of the day, both to rest and to allow their work to dry, since if they proceeded too fast the soft material would fall with its own weight. Seven days is not too long a time in which to build a perfect swallow's nest; but they are often constructed in a less period, when a pair have arrived late in the season. When the outer wall—which should be fully an inch thick—is finished and well seasoned, it is lined, first with a layer of

slender grasses, and that, again, with a bed of soft feathers: so that no young birds have a more luxurious nest than our's.

Jenny. I should think not, indeed! And when the nest is finished—

Barn-Swallow. Then from four to six eggs are laid. They are small; rather long than round; of a very clear white, spotted with reddish brown. As I said, we take turns in sitting, though I confess that the female does the most of it; and, when the young are hatched, we join in feeding them,—which is no light task; for the little things are always hungry. As soon as they are able to fly, and we can coax them out of the nests, (which is often a matter of some difficulty,) we lead them to some secure perching-place, where we feed them during the day. They are soon able to fly, and are then fed on the wing. In northern latitudes we only raise two broods in a season, and often only one; but at the South we sometimes have three.

Jenny. How beautifully you fly! I love to watch you sailing about,—now all in one place,

and now shooting off so as to be out of sight in a moment.

Barn-Swallow. Yes: there is, perhaps, no bird whose powers of flight are equal to our's. Only think of the immense muscular power in our little bodies and wings, which enables us to sustain ourselves in the air for hours together, without fatigue !

Jenny. There is one thing about swallows which has often puzzled me: I mean their assemblies. Every year, since I can remember, in the month of August, there has been a grand gathering of swallows upon the roof of the house, and another upon the dead tree by the stable. I have sometimes seen hundreds there, now all twittering at once, and now seeming to listen while some one of their number makes a speech. I asked my father about it; and he said he supposed it was a swallows' general convention.

Barn-Swallow. He was not very far from the truth. It is at these assemblies that we decide upon our plans for the winter, and other matters pertaining to our annual emigra-

tion; for I suppose you know that we go South every fall.

Jenny. I thought so, but I was not sure. Indeed, some one told me that swallows sometimes go down to the bottom of the ponds and lakes, where they remain torpid all winter.

Barn-Swallow. Some people have had such a notion; but it is all nonsense. A swallow could no more live at the bottom of a pond than yourself. Even if he could, why should he do so, when we have such a power of flight that we can easily pass over hundreds of miles in a day? Why, when even the little, short-winged chipping-birds and yellow-birds, and the heavy robins, go South to spend the winter, isn't it a likely story that swallows should pass such a large portion of their lives buried in mud, or hung up in a hollow tree like hams in a smoke-house? The very idea is absurd.

Jenny. But when do you go? I never saw you set off.

Barn-Swallow. We start very early in the morning, before most people are up. As soon as our plans are all definitely settled, the

earliest dawn of the first fair day sees us on our way. We fly at no very great height, skimming over the tops of the trees, and hunting as we go,—though we try to keep pretty well together. At night we roost in beds of reeds and in other sheltered and secluded places, till we arrive at our destination.

Jenny. Where is that?

Barn-Swallow. Most of the swallows in this country go to South America for the coldest weather; but we do not confine ourselves to any particular spot. Swallows are great travellers; and I may venture to say that I have seen more of South America than the great Baron Humboldt himself.

Martin. We have talked a long time about ourselves and our nests, cousin: suppose you try to give Miss Jenny some information about other branches of our family,—the republican swallows and their curious nests, for instance. I dare say she never saw any of them; for there are none in this neighbourhood that I know of.

Jenny. I have seen some birds that looked like swallows flying in and out of round

holes in the high sand-bank near the school-house.

Swallow. Those are the sand-martins; and very shrewd little fellows they are. The republican swallows, however, make their nests on the outside of the cliff or wall. They begin to build as soon as they arrive, and lay the foundations of their nests in much the same way as the barn-swallows, except that they use no grass or other binding material. Instead of having the side to the rock or wall, the nest projects horizontally from it, and is shaped very much like a short-necked bottle, the neck being about two inches long. They work only a part of each day, to allow time for their building to dry and harden, and both males and females resort to the neighbouring bushes to roost before the female begins to sit. Their nests are very frail, and can hardly be touched without crumbling; but they seem to serve the purpose of the swallows well enough. Sometimes as many as fifty of them are to be seen, hanging close together; for, like us swallows, they are fond of each others' society. It now and then happens that a pair of them arrive

so late as to have no time to build a complete nest,—in which case they take possession of a hole in the wall, fit it with a neck, and set up housekeeping in it. Like the swallows, they return to the same place year after year; and, fragile as they seem, the nests last for several seasons. They migrate in the latter end of summer, and many of them spend the winter in Louisiana.

Jenny. I wish they would come to this place. I should much like to see their bottle nests hanging all together.

Barn-Swallow. Perhaps they may do so; for they are enterprising birds, and very fond of exploring and taking possession of new localities. Now, *martin*, it is your turn to talk. Tell her all about the bank-swallows or sand-martins.

Martin. I dare say she knows all about them already.

Jenny. Not I. As I said just now, I have seen the holes in the bank, and the birds flying in and out of them; but, though I have watched many a time, I never could catch them at their work.

Martin. I wonder at that; for they are very industrious, and either the male or female is always pecking and scratching away till the nest is finished. But perhaps you did not take the right time for observing them. They arrive rather earlier than we do, as they never go so far South, and immediately set to work. The female usually commences the task. Supporting herself by her claws, with the help also of her wings and tail, she pecks away at the sandy earth till she has made a hole deep enough to admit her body. As soon as that is done, she is able to use her claws as well as her bill, and the work proceeds so rapidly that the little architect is soon out of sight. The male and female relieve each other; and the tunnel—generally four or five feet long, and seldom less than three—is usually finished in four days' time. The farther end is enlarged into a commodious apartment and lined with a little grass and a few feathers; and in this safe retreat the female lays from five to seven pure-white eggs. These are soon hatched, and before long the young ones are able to crawl to the entrance of their hole, to

look about them and watch for the return of their parents. But they sometimes pay dearly for this amusement. The hawks and crows are on the look-out for them, and many are snapped up and carried off, in spite of the cries of their parents and the sympathizing attempts of their neighbours to render them assistance. When the sand-martins raise but one brood, the male and female join their offices in taking care of the young ones after they are able to leave the nest; but when they have two families in a season the male takes the entire charge of the first brood, while his mate attends to the second.

Jenny. That is a very nice way. I have always liked swallows and martins, but I shall take more interest in them than ever, now that I know so much about them.

Barn-Swallow. How would you like to eat a swallow's nest, Miss Jenny?

Jenny. I do not think I should like it at all. I am not fond either of mud or of sticks. Why, does any one eat them?

Barn-Swallow. Yes: the Chinese are very fond of them, and consider them not only a

great delicacy, but of wonderful use in restoring the health. But you must not think they are such swallows as you see about here. They are a peculiar kind, which inhabit the coasts of the Indian Ocean and build in dark caverns by the sea-shore. Their nests are not made of sticks or mud, but of a kind of seaweed, which the bird gathers and works over in its bill and stomach till it loses its form and becomes a white, jelly-like substance, after which it is used in the formation of nests. These nests are gathered with great care, and only at stated times, by persons appointed for the purpose; and it is often a service of some danger, as they are placed upon the most inaccessible ledges of the caverns to which these birds resort. The nests are cup-shaped, formed in layers; and the best are of a whitish colour. Those which are dark, spotted or striped with blood are sold at a cheaper rate than the others. The Chinese people dissolve these nests in their soup. They are so expensive that only rich people can have them,—which, I dare say, is one reason why they are so much valued.

Jenny. I don't think, after all, that I should care to eat them. But now I want to ask you about a very curious bird that I saw last night after sunset. He was of a mottled-gray colour, with long narrow wings and a very large head. He flew very high, and seemed to sail about in the air almost as easily as a swallow; but every now and then he would close his wings and come down with a booming sound, so suddenly that you would expect to see him dash head-foremost to the ground; but he always saved himself just in time, and turned upwards again. He made a very curious noise when he was sailing about in the air, but only made the booming sound when he came down. He seemed to be catching flies; and I thought perhaps he might be a kind of swallow.

Martin. No: he is not a swallow,—although, as you observed, he gains his living by catching flies. That was the night-hawk, as he is called in this country. He is first-cousin to those curious birds the whippoorwill and the chuckwill's widow, the first of which I dare say you may have seen, though there are not

many of them about here. He is a harmless fellow, and deserves the name of hawk as little as I do. Like us, they spend the winter in the South, returning to the Middle and Northern States in April and May to rear their young. Directly after their arrival, you may see them courting their mates, and performing all sorts of curious gambols on the wing, some of which are very entertaining. They make no pretence of a nest, but the female lays her eggs on the bare ground, without even making a hollow place for their reception. The young ones when hatched are covered with dusky down, and so nearly resemble in colour the earth on which they lie that it is not easy to see them. Notwithstanding this apparent carelessness about her nest, the night-hawk is a good mother. If any one approaches her eggs or young ones, she will fly off, and tumble about on the ground in such a way that any one who did not know the secret would certainly suppose that she had broken a wing. But no sooner has she succeeded in drawing the intruder away from the place, than she lays aside her lameness, takes wing, and returns

by a circuitous route to the objects of her care.

Jenny. And what about the whippoorwill? I never heard one here; but when I was visiting my cousin in Vermont, they used to come into the garden, and would even sit on the door-step and sing. I heard them again when I was in Michigan; but they seemed to be in a greater hurry than the Vermont whippoorwills, and did not pronounce the words nearly so plainly. I never saw one close enough to have a good look at it till one day, when my cousin and I were walking, we happened to see one asleep in the end of a hollow log, and came close to it before it waked up. When it found that it could not get out, it ruffled up its feathers till it was as round as a ball, and opened its great mouth so wide that I almost thought it was going to swallow me. We did not meddle with it; and, as soon as we had got out of the way a little, it flew off to a tree, where it seemed to settle itself for another nap. Cousin said she thought they hardly ever stirred abroad in the daytime.

Barn-Swallow. She was right. They fly at

dawn, and in the evening,—sometimes till midnight on moonlight nights. Though they do not rise high, their flight is very swift and graceful, and almost as noiseless as that of the owl. The whippoorwill, like the night-hawk, nests on the bare ground, and the young ones, which are covered with down from their birth, look like nothing so much as a little heap of mould. Unlike the night-hawk, they run very swiftly; and it is by no means easy to secure them. If upon the whippoorwills' return to the nest they find that their eggs have been meddled with, they will each take one in their great mouths and transport them to a place of safety.

Jenny. What is the chuck-will's-widow? It has a curious name.

Martin. It is named, like the whippoorwill, from its note. It bears a great resemblance to its Northern cousin, and their habits seem to be nearly the same. Like the whippoorwill, it will remove its eggs and young if it has reason to think that they have been discovered. But, Miss Jenny, we have been talking

here a long while: it is quite time for me to set about my work.

Barn-Swallow. And it is quite time that I set about mine. If you like, Miss Jenny, you can come up into the loft and watch us at our building. It is a very pretty sight.

Jenny. I dare say it is, and at another time I shall be happy to accept your invitation; but now I must go and get ready for school.

The guacharo, described by the great Humboldt, seems to be akin to the whippoorwill and chuckwill's widow, and their cousin the European nightjar, or goat-sucker,—though there are many striking points of difference. The guacharo is as large as a barn-door fowl; and its wings have a spread of three feet. It is strictly a nocturnal bird, remaining hidden during the day and quitting its cavern at nightfall, especially on moonlight nights. It feeds upon dry and hard fruits and nuts, which when taken from the crops of the young birds are greatly valued as a remedy for the intermittent fevers of the country. Its cry is frightfully shrill and harsh. Thousands

of the young birds are killed every year for the sake of the fat with which they abound, and which, after being clarified, is employed in the place of butter or lard.

The cavern of Caripe, which is the principal haunt of the guacharos, is a magnificent one, and is beautifully described by the great naturalist in his first volume of South American travel. It is entered by an arch eighty feet wide and seventy-two feet in height, opening in the face of a rock and surrounded by all the luxuriance of tropical vegetation. A small stream flows out of it, which forms the river Caripe. Its extent is unknown; and Baron Humboldt was prevented from exploring it to any great depth by the superstitions of his Indian guides, who regarded it and every thing connected with it with the greatest awe. They imagine its deep recess to be the resort of their departed relatives and friends; and when one of their number dies, they say he is gone to join the guacharos. It is probably owing to this feeling that the birds are not exterminated; since no reward will induce the Indians to proceed farther than a

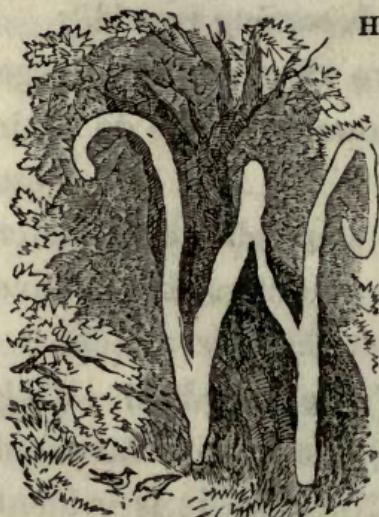
certain point,—beyond which the guacharos are left to rest and breed in peace. The nests are knocked down with long poles, and the young birds are killed and opened on the spot, when their bodies are found to contain a large mass of pure fat. This fat, when clarified, is half liquid, transparent, and so pure that it may be kept for a year without becoming rancid.

Every one must have observed the large gatherings of the swallows previous to their departure for the South in the fall; and these assemblies seem to have so much the character of well-ordered business meetings that I have ventured to conclude that they were such.

I find the notion of the king-bird eating only the drones among the bees is favoured both by Audubon and Nuttall. It is evident to any careful observer that he makes a selection,—though it is not easy to tell by what his choice is influenced.

CHAPTER V.

ROBIN-REDBREAST.



HAT a beautiful morning it is! as soft and warm as summer. I do believe spring is coming at last. The Spanish currant is quite green, and the pussies are coming out on the willows; and here are some dear little white violets in blossom.

How sweet they are! Yes, and there is the robin come back at last. I never knew him so late before. What kept you so long away, Robin? I began to think that some misfortune must have happened to you. Where have you been all winter?

Robin. I have been in Louisiana most of

Jenny and the Birds.



The Robin.

p. 144.

the time, Miss Jenny; and the reason of my being late is that I hurt one of my wings, so that I could not fly very well. I have been obliged to travel slowly upon that account.

Jenny. Do you always spend your winters at the South?

Robin. Almost always,—though I have sometimes stayed in the southern part of Pennsylvania; but I do not like it nearly as well. Food often becomes scarce, and there is not such a variety in the fruits and berries, while insects are hardly to be had at all. Now, in Louisiana I had berries of all sorts and insects in abundance. Oh, yes, it is much pleasanter there than here in the cold season. The worst of it is, that with such an abundance of rich food we grow so fat as to be considered very good eating, and a great many of us are shot and sent to market. That was the way I came to have my wing hurt.

Jenny. People don't often shoot robins here except in cherry-time; and then it is mostly on account of their getting mixed up with the thievish, greedy, ill-mannered cherry-birds.

Robin. I don't think any one need grudge

a robin the few cherries he eats and carries home,—especially as he eats them in a decent and respectable way, picking one at a time and flying away with it; whereas the cherry-bird will peck the sunny side of every cherry on the tree and not leave one fit for anybody else to eat. The cherry-birds do not sing, either: so they seem to give nothing in exchange for what they take. Now, a robin—although I say it myself—is a very good singer.

Jenny. Yes, that he is; and what I particularly like about him is that he sings not only on bright and sunny mornings, but on dark, gloomy, rainy days, when no other bird would think of opening his mouth.

Robin. That is true of most of our family. We do not mind the weather, so long as it is not very cold. You may have observed the same trait in my cousin, the wood-thrush, who often strikes up his sweetest notes in the midst of a rain-storm. The brown thrush and the mocking-bird prefer warm and sunny days; and so does the cat-bird, who, though he will sing in rainy weather, mews so pitifully in the interval that it is really unpleasant to hear him.

Jenny. I did not know before that thrushes and robins were related to each other.

Robin. You must remember that I am not really a robin,—though I am commonly so called. When the English settlers first came to this country, they were delighted with every thing that put them in mind of home; and, seeing me, with my chestnut-red breast and brown back, they gave me the name of robin, after the familiar redbreast they had left at home. In reality, I am a thrush; and so are the other birds I have mentioned.

Jenny. I am rather sorry to hear that. I always hoped you might be descended from the robins that covered the children with leaves in the old story.

Robin. You will have to go to England to see any of those robins, my dear. They are very plentiful and tame in that country, where no one ever thinks of killing them. They are even more fond of the society of men than ourselves, and would much rather build in the neighbourhood of a farm-yard or dwelling-house than at a distance. The climate of England being much milder than our's, many

of them remain all winter, and are frequently fed by kind-hearted people, who like to see them about.

Jenny. I have heard the Baltimore bird, or hangingbird, called the English robin.

Robin. That is a mistake even greater than the other. The Baltimore bird is more nearly related to the crow-blackbirds and the starlings. You must have observed that their nests are very different from our's.

Jenny. Oh, yes! Your's are built partly of mud, and are always set on a firm and solid base; while his looks like a little purse of rough cloth, and is always hung on the end of a branch. What a pretty affair it is!

Robin. It is, indeed; and though I cannot say I should fancy such a swinging cradle, yet I love to see him at work. How nicely he lays his foundation with several long crossed threads, and how skilfully he weaves his other strings in among them!—almost as well as you would do it with a needle: yet he manages it all with no other tools than his slender little bill and claws.

Jenny. Yes: I have often watched him and

his mate; and sometimes we put out strings and cotton for him. He seems delighted when he finds them; and I have often laughed to see him singing with his mouth full of tow. Last year the female stole two or three skeins of Fanny's scarlet embroidering-silk. She could not think what had become of them, till the leaves fell off,—when she saw them all twisted round the oriole's nest.

Robin. Yes, I dare say. I once saw the female oriole fly to her nest with a long piece of candle-wicking in her mouth, and go to work to twist it into the structure. It was two or three days before she got the ends fairly disposed of; and all the time the wrens teased her shamefully, by coming and pulling at them when she was at work inside. Out she would come and scold at them, and off would go the wrens, laughing and chuckling among themselves; but no sooner did she return to her work than the mischievous little things came back for another twitch. It is rather curious that when the oriole builds here at the North she chooses the sunny side of a tree, and always puts a thick lining into her

nest; while in Louisiana and other places at the South she selects the shady side of the tree and uses no lining whatever.

Jenny. She is a wise little bird. I like the orioles not only for their beauty, but for their delightful song. You hardly ever hear two of them sing exactly alike.

Robin. Almost every one of them has a song of his own; and they have considerable powers of mimicry. I have heard one of them imitate the song of a canary in a ridiculous way.

Jenny. Is there more than one kind of oriole? I have seen a bird in the orchard which looks something like him,—though his colours are not so brilliant, and the red is more of a chestnut colour. He sings almost as well as the oriole, but makes a great deal more fuss about it; and he is always jerking his tail.

Robin. That is the orchard oriole, first-cousin to the Baltimore bird. You may see quite a variety in their colours; for they do not get their perfect plumage till they are four years old: so that many persons have

supposed that there were two or three distinct species. The nest is very pretty and neat, though not so elaborate as that of the Baltimore oriole. He is a very clever fellow and a good neighbour. But there is another and more distant relative of the Baltimore, whose song I admire more than any of them. I mean the bobolink, as you call him here.

Jenny. Oh, yes: I know him. I do think he is charming! His notes are not so clear as those of the oriole; but he has a much greater variety of them, and as his performance seems rather a pleasure than a task to him, I am never tired of listening to him. But does not the female bobolink sing? I think I have heard her.

Robin. Not that ever I knew of; but I dare say you may have been deceived by seeing the male in his winter plumage, when he looks exactly like the female. It is only during the pairing-season that he wears his smart black-and-white suit; and some of them come to the North almost every spring before the change takes place in their feathers. The female oriole sings very nicely sometimes.

Jenny. Does the bobolink spend his winters at the South?

Robin. He does, and he is there called the rice-bird and reed-bird; but he goes farther south than the rest of us, and only passes through the Southern States on his return. It is curious that when journeying north and east in the spring they fly mostly by night, but when returning in the fall they travel in the daytime.

Jenny. Last summer I found a bobolink's nest on the ground in our meadow. It was so snugly hidden that I might have looked ever so long without finding it, if I had not come upon it by accident. There were three or four young ones in it, almost ready to fly; but both of the old birds were away: so that I did not know at first what sort of birds they were. I hid behind a bush, to watch; and presently back they came flying, each with his mouth full of worms to feed the little birds. After a while they caught sight of me; and then what a fuss they made! They both hastened away to the other side of the meadow, where they began to fly round and round and dive into

the grass, so that, if I had not known better, I should certainly have thought that their nest was there. I went to look at them again next day ; but they were all gone !

Robin. I presume that you were no sooner out of sight than they carried the little ones away to some safer place. They raise only one brood in the season, and as soon as they are large enough to fly, the parties begin to collect for emigration along the borders of the streams and swamps. By the time they have reached Pennsylvania, they are congregated in immense flocks, which follow the sea-shore and the courses of the great rivers, to feed on the seeds of the reeds, which are now ripe, and of which they are exceedingly fond. This sort of food makes them very fat, and thousands upon thousands of them are killed and sent to market : yet their numbers never seem to diminish. Still farther South they eat rice, and are there called rice-birds. At this time all the males are yellowish brown, like the females, and none of them sing at all. So they go on to their destination, to return again in the spring.

Jenny. How curious it is! I wonder how they know exactly where to go?

Robin. I suppose, Miss Jenny, that the One who made them taught them how to find their way over land and sea, just as he taught them how to build their nests and feed their young.

Jenny. There is a bird that sings on the top of the elm-tree every morning. His plumage is not very beautiful, for it is nearly all pale-brown and white, but he has a charming song. I never heard such a variety of notes from a wild bird.

Robin. That is the brown thrush, or thrasher, as the boys call him. He is a relative of mine, as well as the cat-bird and the mocking-bird, which I dare say you have seen,—though the latter is never found wild in this part of the country.

Jenny. Is the mocking-bird your cousin? I shall be glad to hear of him; but first, if you please, tell me about the brown thrush. Where does he come from?

Robin. He was hatched here, and goes South in winter, like the rest of us. In fact, a great many of them remain and breed there;

but others return to the North every spring. Unlike the bobolinks and orioles, they travel singly and by very short journeys, stopping to rest at almost every pleasant halting-place, but never singing till they reach their journey's end. Then, indeed, you may hear the brown thrasher, after his nest is built and his mate has begun to sit, perched upon the very tip-top of the tallest tree he can find, repeating his song, and spreading his wings and jerking his tail in a perfect ecstasy. It must be confessed that he is a delightful singer. He never attempts to mimic other birds, but is content with his own notes, of which he has a very great variety. When he has sung till he is tired, he dives down at one plunge to his nest, and has a quiet little chat with his wife, for whose entertainment he has been exerting himself. Should any intruder approach the nest, he not only attacks him with all his own force, but, by a peculiar signal-cry, calls all his relatives in the neighbourhood to his assistance. It is very much to the credit of the thrushes that, though they sometimes quarrel among themselves, they never fail to assist

one of their number in any emergency,—at much risk to themselves, too. I once saw a party of them summoned to the rescue when the nest of one of their number was attacked by a black-snake, which is very fond both of the eggs and the young birds. It was really touching to see how gallantly they fought him. One pecked at his eyes, another perched on his back and tore off the skin: in short, they annoyed him in a thousand different ways; but I am afraid the combat would have ended in the defeat of the thrushes, if all the other birds had not come to help them. Among us, however, we finally killed the snake; and didn't we sing a song of triumph over his ugly dead body? The poor mother-thrush lost all her eggs, and was nearly killed herself; but she recovered after a while, and they raised a fine family in spite of their misfortunes.* They never hesitate to attack a hawk, a raccoon or a fox; and if the cat ventures to approach, she is pecked and scolded till she is glad to retreat. I must confess that they quarrel with other

* Mr. Audubon was an eye-witness of this scene, which he describes with his usual liveliness.

birds as well; but that is only in the breeding-season. At all other times they are peaceable fellows enough.

Jenny. What is the nest like?

Robin. A good deal like mine,—though he does not raise a clay foundation, but makes his lower story of sticks and stout grass, lining it with fine grass, horse-hair, feathers, and even rags. It is generally placed on a low bush, often on the ground, but sometimes on the lower branches of trees. He never builds in the forest. The female lays from four to six eggs, of a pale-buff colour spotted with brown. They seldom raise more than one brood at the North, but in the Southern States they have two in the course of the season. The young birds soon begin to sing, and may be heard practising with great perseverance upon different parts of their melody. The old birds seldom sing after the breeding-season is over.

The brown thrasher is sometimes called the French mocking-bird,—a title to which he has no right, as he seldom, if ever, sings any song but his own. The poor despised cat-bird, on

the contrary, is a pretty good mimic. He has put me out of patience more than once by his caricatures of my song; but it was foolish to be angry, since he means it all in fun.

Jenny. I never could see why people should dislike cat-birds. They seem to me as harmless as any birds in the world; and I am sure their song is very amusing.

Robin. It is a mere silly prejudice, my dear. Half the people in the world cannot render a better reason for liking or disliking any thing than that "They can't bear it!" "They always did hate a cat-bird," or something equally nonsensical. The cat-bird is a clever, good-tempered fellow, who never willingly injured any person in his life; and, as you say, his imitations, if not always musical, are very amusing.

Jenny. How curiously he squalls sometimes,—just like a little kitten! I have several times heard him in the bushes when I thought that a kitten was lost and crying for help.

Robin. That is his call-note; but he seldom uses it, unless he is in trouble and wishes to attract the attention of his mate. The cat-bird

has a great deal of sympathy; and if the nest of any other bird is interfered with, he seems to take it almost as much to heart as if some misfortune had happened to himself; nay, more than that, I have known cat-birds to feed and bring up young birds of another family which, from some cause, had been left without a protector. The female cat-bird is very much attached to her nest, and hardly any thing will induce her to leave her eggs while she is sitting: so that she would fare badly if she had not such a kind and helpful husband.

Jenny. He is good to his mate, then?

Robin. Of course! You do not think one who was so kind to other birds would leave his own mate to suffer?

Jenny. Why, I don't know. I have seen people who were a good deal more agreeable, among strangers than at home, with their own families.

Robin. That is not the way with the cat-bird at any rate. No one could be kinder or more attentive than he is to his own household. Even after the young birds are fully fledged and able to take care of themselves,

he follows them about and feeds them, and if a man comes near his family you would think he was going to have his eyes pecked out directly by the angry little cat-bird. Nevertheless he takes very little pains to conceal his nest, often building in plain sight and very near the ground.

Jenny. I used to think it was the cat-bird that laid eggs in other birds' nests; but Tom, the crow, told me that it was the cow-black-bird.

Robin. Tom was quite right. The cat-birds would scorn such an action. They will not even hatch the cow-bird's eggs when put into their nests,—though, as I said, they will feed the deserted young of other birds. If all other birds showed as much sense and spirit about that matter as the cat-bird, the cow-birds would soon be reduced to build for themselves, or the race would become extinct,—and no great loss would it be to the world, either. You will be surprised to hear that the cat-bird very often uses the cast-off skins of snakes to line her nest: so that she gets some good out of her inveterate enemies.

Jenny. That is very ingenious in her; but I do not think I should like to sleep upon a bed made of snake-skins.

Robin. Oh, that is only a fancy of your's. They are just as clean as any thing else, and are very soft and elastic.

Jenny. How many eggs does the cat-bird lay?

Robin. Generally four or five, of a deep-green colour, without spots. They raise only one brood in a season.

Jenny. Is not the cat-bird very mischievous in the garden?

Robin. By no means. He likes a cherry now and then, it is true, and he sometimes takes a mouthful out of a pear; but he pays for all he takes, ten times over, by the service he does the gardener in clearing his trees of insects. These creatures form almost his entire food in the spring; and it is no exaggeration to say that a single pair of cat-birds with nestlings will destroy a thousand caterpillars. In consideration of that, I think he may well be allowed a cherry or two, or even the taste of a pear.

Jenny. I should think so too. I have always liked the cat-bird, notwithstanding the stories told about him; and I am glad to hear that his bad character is quite undeserved. And now for the mocking-bird. I have always wanted to hear one. My cousin has a tame one in a cage, which is very lively and amusing; but he was moulting when I was there, and did not sing. Mary says that he imitates every thing he hears,—even the kittens and the little pigs,—besides singing beautifully.

Robin. Ah, but you should hear him as I have heard him,—perched on the top of a tall tree in the cool, early morning,—to know how a mocking-bird can sing. You would think all the birds of the fields and forest were collected in one spot and trying their powers. One moment it is a robin, the next a whippoorwill, then a blackbird's clear, strong note, or the loud, mellow whistle of the oriole. The next moment, perhaps, you will hear a blue jay squall, or the caw! caw! of the crow, or the cackle of the hens in the barn-yard. He will go on thus for hours, seemingly in a perfect ecstasy with his own performance. .

Jenny. But has the mocking-bird no notes of his own?

Robin. Yes; he has a very pleasant song, which he mixes up with his various imitations; but he never keeps to it long at a time. All the while that he is singing he keeps a sharp look-out, that no snake, or cat, or any other lurking enemy may come near where his quiet, modest little wife is sitting. He will attack and drive off the hawk, and has even been known to overcome and destroy the dreaded rattle-snake. He is a very brave fellow, and will never cease fighting for his family as long as he has any breath left in his body.

Jenny. How does he build his nest?

Robin. The outer walls are made of twigs, leaves and bits of wood, lined with small, fibrous roots. It is generally placed in a brier-bush in some lonely and quiet spot,—though now and then one will take a fancy to build in a tree close to the house. The female lays four or five eggs, of a pale green spotted with brown, and sits fourteen days. They generally raise two broods in a season, and are very assiduous in feeding and defending their young.

As soon as the young birds are fully fledged and able to take care of themselves, they leave their father and mother, who immediately set to work to raise another family. During the winter they feed on berries and such insects as they can find, living principally about the plantations and farm-houses, where they are sure of protection. The older males are to be heard on every mild day singing with great spirit, while the young ones practise very industriously.

Jenny. Do birds practise their songs? I did not know that. I thought they sung, as they build their nests, by instinct.

Robin. By no means. True, the song of each species has the same general character; but hardly any two birds sing exactly alike, and it costs them a good deal of pains to learn their song. You may often hear the oriole repeating again and again some particular strain that has caught his fancy, and persevering till he gets it right. I have also seen a yellow-bird listening attentively to a caged canary and taking a great deal of pains to learn his notes. Birds often pick up bits of

each others' song in this way,—especially if they are caged and have no other way of amusing themselves. Even the mocking-bird is often obliged to try a good many times before he can succeed with some particular strain.

Jenny. Well, that is new to me. I always thought that birds had no trouble in life,—nothing to do but to build their nests and feed their young ones.

Robin. I should say that was enough. How would you like to spend the pleasantest days of spring in masons' and carpenters' work, to say nothing of upholstery and weaving? I can tell you that it is no small labour to build a bird's nest. How many times do you think my mate and I had to fly from the shelf in the summer-house to the pond in the orchard before we got together clay enough for the foundation of our nest?

Jenny. A great many times, I dare say,—because you had only your bills to carry it in and could bring but a little at a time. Then you had to hollow it into shape and

to gather grass and straws to line it with. To be sure, it was a good deal of work.

Robin. And you must remember that when the nest is finished the work of the season is only begun. My good wife sits fourteen days steadily on her eggs, never leaving them, except for a very few minutes at a time to drink and refresh herself with a little exercise. Then, when the brood is at last hatched, what trouble to satisfy the four greedy little bills which are always outstretched for more! From the first peep of daylight till after sunset they are fed at least once every ten or fifteen minutes, with part of a worm, a caterpillar, or a spider,—for at that age they eat nothing but animal food; though when they are older we give them a little fruit now and then. Then they must be dressed and kept clean; and, as soon as their feathers are grown and their wings have acquired sufficient strength to support their bodies, they must be taught to fly and take care of themselves. Then the nest must be cleaned and repaired for the next brood, and there is the same labour to be performed again. So

you see that the life of a bird is not all play, by any means.

Jenny. Yet you always seem to enjoy yourselves.

Robin. And so we do. It does not follow that a bird must be miserable because he has his claws full of work. We love our families, and that makes it a pleasure to provide for their support; and we enjoy all the beautiful sights and sounds which have been provided for us much more when we are in the way of our duty than we should if we had nothing to do but to idle about all day and amuse ourselves.

Jenny. That is very true, and reminds me that I have something to do besides playing in the garden. I shall not enjoy myself very much to-day if I begin by being late at school.

The robin of America is almost as universal a favourite as his namesake in England; and few people grudge him the cherry that he now and then carries off. He is very confiding, and is fond of building in the garden or orchard, or in an out-house, if he can find a place suited

to his purpose. A pair of robins built year after year in an arbour in my father's garden, where a shelf over the door afforded them a very convenient resting-place; and the female became so tame as to allow the children to climb up and look at her as she sat on her eggs. Mr. Nuttall mentions a pair which built their nest and reared their young on the timbers of an unfinished ship, undisturbed by the noise of the carpenters. The English robin is even more familiar; and I have somewhere read a story of one of these birds which not only laid her eggs in a nest constructed somewhere about a coal-wagon, but actually accompanied the wagon in its journeys to and from the pit, sitting quietly on her eggs the whole time.

Where I once spent a summer, a pair of robins built their nest and raised one brood on a locust-tree, the branches of which came almost in at my window; but, either disliking to be so closely overlooked, or annoyed by the proximity of a school-bell, which was rung every half-hour all day, no sooner were the young ones fairly out of the way than they

determined on a removal. This they accomplished with great skill, choosing a rainy day for the purpose, and transported the whole of their materials from the first situation to a tree farther removed from the house, where they raised a second brood.

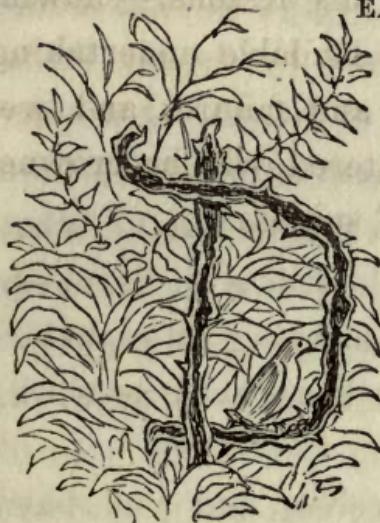
It was while I occupied the same room that my canary-bird Chloe, an accomplished musician, undertook the tuition of a music-pupil. It was a cat-bird. I used to hang the cage out of the window early in the morning. No sooner did the canary strike up its song than the cat-bird would make his appearance; and, after listening in attentive silence till the strain was concluded, he would attempt to repeat it, —at first, it must be confessed, with very indifferent success. But Chloe persevered, singing a few notes over and over again till the cat-bird caught and repeated them to the satisfaction of the canary, who would then proceed to another strain. It happened one day that an oriole came along in the midst of the lesson, and, after listening for a few moments, struck up such a comically caricatured imitation of the little music-teacher's notes,

that it was impossible not to laugh heartily. This performance he repeated two or three times, till Chloe became quite disgusted with his impertinence.

It may be interesting, and perhaps encouraging, to some of our readers to learn that the cat-bird turned out a reasonably good performer at the end of his lessons,—showing that perseverance in a laudable undertaking, though many obstacles and failures, and even ridicule, may be encountered, will be crowned with a good measure of success.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. WREN AND HER FRIENDS.



EAR me! how much I have got to do this morning! Here is this box to be thoroughly cleaned out before I can think of living in it. It seems to me I never saw any thing in such a state. And then we must get together materials for a new nest; and where to look for them I am sure I don't know, for there seems to be nothing lying about this season. I suppose I shall be obliged to leave all that part of the business to my mate; for some one must stay at home to see that those pert blue-birds don't take possession of the box. They are always poking their noses in everywhere.

I don't see, for my part, why birds cannot mind their own business. Here is a great bit of mud, now: I wonder who brought that in? For I am sure I didn't. Such an idea as building a nest with mud never entered into my head. I believe I will keep the largest of these sticks for a foundation.

There, now! the box begins to look something like being inhabited by decent birds, —though there is a deal to do yet. I wonder where my mate keeps himself so long? Oh, here he comes, with his mouth full, as usual. What a smart, industrious little fellow he is, never wasting a moment, from morning till night!

Well, my dear, I have been hard at work, you see.

Mr. Wren. So I perceive; and you have worked to some purpose, too. I would not have thought that you could accomplish so much in so short a time. Don't you mean to turn all the old sticks out?

Mrs. Wren. No: I think the larger ones will do very well to begin upon, when I shall have arranged them a little. But who did you see? And did you hear any news?

Mr. Wren. Nothing very special. All the chipping-birds and goldfinches have come back, as usual, and the robin has returned to her old corner in the summer-house. The orioles have concluded to leave the elm-tree to the young birds, and are intending to build in the willow just over our heads. I mean to have some fun with them when they get about their work.

Mrs. Wren. I would not interfere with them, if I were you. They are so sensitive that they never can take a joke. Last summer they had carried off a long piece of cotton string, and were very busy weaving it into their nest. I was passing along, and saw the long ends hanging down, and, just for fun, gave them a twitch, when out popped Mrs. Oriole in a great passion, and—would you believe it?—she actually accused me of trying to steal her strings! The idea! As if I could not pick up strings for myself if I wanted them!

Mr. Wren. What did you do?

Mrs. Wren. I tried to turn it off good-naturedly at first, and assured her that it was only a joke; but I found she was determined to

quarrel: so I came away and left her. I think that is always the best way to do with such people.

Mr. Wren. I don't see any use in being so quarrelsome, for my part,—though, to be sure, we never want any one to come near our nest.

Mrs. Wren. Oh, well, that is different. But come; I want some more sticks. Don't you see that I am out of work?

Mr. Wren. It would be the death of you, I do believe, if you were obliged to sit idle a moment.

Mrs. Wren. I am sure, to get ready for summer, there is enough to do to keep us both busy for some time to come. I dare say you would like to have me sit in the end of a hollow log and sleep all day, like the whip-poorwill.

Mr. Wren. Not if you kept awake all night, as she does. But what do you want next?

Mrs. Wren. More sticks, of course,—nice crooked ones. It will need a great many to fill up this box.

Mr. Wren. Do you really think the world

would come to an end if it were not filled as full as it could hold?

Mrs. Wren. I don't know about the world, —that is no affair of mine; but I know I mean to have a nice nest, if I pick up every stick myself. Come, now, there's a good bird. Bring me a spider, if you happen to see one. I am as hungry as a young swallow.

Mr. Wren. If young swallows have any better appetites than young wrens, I pity their parents. Suppose I cannot find a spider: shall I bring a caterpillar?

Mrs. Wren. I don't care what it is, if it is only eatable. But come, make haste. I do think I never saw a bird so fond of hearing himself talk. I suppose I might as well be gathering a few sticks myself if I can find any near at hand; and here are some nice ones close under the tree, just right to put in the corners of the box and keep all steady. Now, little girl, what do you want here?

Jenny. Only to see how you get on with your nest, Mrs. Wren. I should think you had known me long enough not to be afraid of me.

Mrs. Wren. Oh, is it you, Miss Jenny? I beg your pardon. You have grown so much that I really did not know you. You will be quite a woman soon.

Jenny. Yes: mother says I shall have to study hard to keep up with myself. I go to the upper school now.

Mrs. Wren. I don't know much about schools. We birds always educate our own children.

Jenny. I suppose all your wisdom came to you naturally.

Mrs. Wren. A good deal of it does. For I suppose a wren would know how to build a nest, and would make it upon the same general plan, even if she had never seen one; but still we take a good deal of pains in teaching our young ones to hunt and to sing. You may observe that some birds are much more sensible than others, even of the same sort. Thus, I knew a wren who was so anxious to fill up all the corners of her nest that she let her eggs get cold, and they all came to nothing.

Jenny. Why are you so anxious to fill up all the space in your box?

Mrs. Wren. It makes the nest much more easy to sit in, and retains the eggs in their places when we are obliged to leave them, besides keeping them warm,—which, you know, is absolutely essential to their being hatched. If it so happens that eggs are once thoroughly chilled after having been sat upon, they are good for nothing.

Jenny. And why do you make the entrance so very small?

Mrs. Wren. That is to prevent any one from interfering with us. Now, the cow-blackbird, which annoys the other birds so much, never comes near us. She cannot get in at our door.

Jenny. How many eggs do you lay?

Mrs. Wren. From six to ten. We almost always have a large family; and, instead of turning the first brood off when we set about raising a second, we like to have them about us as long as we can. They all keep together, and almost always come home to their native tree to roost, unless they should happen to

find the deserted nest of some other bird,—when they will all crowd into that, and keep one another warm.

Jenny. You must be pretty well crowded, and kept pretty busy too, with so many little mouths to fill.

Mrs. Wren. We are, indeed; but that is what we like. A wren is never so happy as when he has as much as he can do; and so fond is he of building that he very often begins a new nest while his mate is sitting on the old one,—just to keep his hand in, as you say. But young wrens learn to provide for themselves sooner than any other birds, and we might turn them off much earlier than we do, only that, as I remarked, we like to keep together as long as we can.

Jenny. What do wrens eat?

Mrs. Wren. All sorts of insects. We are particularly fond of spiders; but nothing which is not too large to be managed comes amiss to us; and we destroy a great many caterpillars. I foresee that this old willow will yield us a plentiful harvest of them this year; for the leaves are covered with their eggs.

Jenny. I wish you would pick off the eggs, then, and keep the caterpillars from coming out. It would be a great convenience to us.

Mrs. Wren. We do eat a great many; but, if we undertook to destroy them all, we should not be able to do any thing else. We are very fond of another insect very troublesome to man: I mean the green-and-brown step-worms, or measure-worms; and we are very ingenious at finding them. They may stick themselves straight out into the air and look as much like a twig as they please, but they cannot deceive us. Moreover, we are fond of flies; and neither crumbs of bread nor bits of meat come amiss to us. You might mention to Emma that it would be an accommodation to us if she would shake the table and crumb-cloths out at the window.

Jenny. I will do so. But are you not afraid of the cat if you come down to pick up the crumbs?

Mrs. Wren. Oh, no: we keep a pretty good look-out for her. But you should teach her not to catch birds.

Jenny. I have tried to do so; but she don't

seem to understand why it should be right to catch rats and mice and wrong to catch birds. She will let the little chickens walk right over her, lie down by her side and even pull the meat out of her mouth, without offering to hurt them; but she will always catch wild birds.* I dare say she thinks they were made on purpose to be eaten.

Mrs. Wren. It would be just like her impudence to think so. I am sure I have often wished that there was not a cat in the world.

Jenny. I dare say the spiders and caterpillars would like it if there were not a wren in the world. Is there more than one kind of wren?

Mrs. Wren. Yes,—several. There is the winter-wren, which some people think is the same as the European wren,—though there is, in reality, some little difference between them. He is a tiny fellow, not so big as I am, but very bold and hardy, caring little for the roughest weather, so that he has enough to eat. Then there are the marsh-wrens, which

* The author had a large Maltese cat that always made this distinction.

build in swampy places by the side of rivers and lakes; the great Carolina wren, who is a famous singer, but rather a quarrelsome fellow; the little wood-wren; the rock-wren; the California ground-wren; and some others. Did you ever see the nest of the marsh-wren?

Jenny. Not that I know of.

Mrs. Wren. It would be well worth your while to take a look for one, some day when you are down by the river. You never in your life saw any thing prettier in the shape of a nest. It even beats mine in beauty,—though I do not know that it is any more comfortable.

Jenny. What is it like?

Mrs. Wren. Something like a cocoanut in appearance. It is made of dry or partly-green sedge; sometimes of the long leaves and stems of the tussock-grass, very firmly woven together into a ball, with a little door at one side just large enough for one bird to enter at a time. This pretty ball is tied very securely to the top of the reeds or flags,—always above high-water-mark,—and in it the female lays six or eight chocolate-coloured eggs, about as

large as the gold beads of your grandmother's necklace. The male is very attentive to his mate, and in the interval of waiting upon her he amuses himself by building nests in the neighbourhood,—sometimes, too, by quarrelling with his neighbours, for he is rather a turbulent little fellow. Notwithstanding the marsh-wrens take so much pains with their nest, they never use it more than once, building a new nest for each brood, of which they raise two in the season. They are very active, busy little creatures, always running and climbing about among the reeds, where they find a plenty of little insects and small shellfish, which is the kind of food they prefer. There are two species of marsh-wrens,—the long and the short billed. The nest of the long-billed species is shaped more like a bottle, and is sometimes built on a tussock of grass instead of a reed. Like all wrens' nests, it is very snug and warm. They are quite timid birds, and not at all fond of the society of man: so that they are seldom seen except when one goes to look for them.

Jenny. And what about the musician?

Mrs. Wren. You mean the Carolina wren. You never see him about here. He does not often show himself north of the State of Maryland, but keeps to his own side of the country, as we do to our's. He has much the same habits as ourselves, and loves to build very near the house or barn; but, instead of employing sticks, he makes his nest principally of hay, grass, stems, and the long Spanish moss which grows abundantly upon the trees at the South and is very convenient for the birds. He is a great singer, and can imitate the notes of other birds almost as well as the mocking-bird himself. The California ground-wren is of a dark-brown colour, and, like our marsh-wren, frequents reeds and rushes; but I have not much acquaintance with him.

Jenny. Do wrens migrate?

Mrs. Wren. Certainly,—though the winter-wren often remains at the North through all the cold season. But he is a hardy little fellow, and does not mind the cold,—or rather he likes it, preferring to spend even his winters in Labrador and those far Northern regions. I once asked him what possible attraction he

found there; but he only laughed, and said, "Every one to his taste." But all the rest of us go off in the fall.

Jenny. Where do you go?

Mrs. Wren. Excuse me, Miss Jenny, but that is a secret. I should not like to appear rude, but the fact is that we wrens like to keep that matter to ourselves, and I should not dare to look my husband in the face if I told. I hope you will not be offended at my refusal.

Jenny. Oh, no, not at all: only I should not think you could make very long journeys with your short wings. You never seem to fly far at a time.

Mrs. Wren. We take it very leisurely, and, indeed, spend almost half our time in travelling: so that we are nearly three months on the way to—Dear me! I had almost let it out!

Jenny. Perhaps we had better talk about something else, and then you will be under no temptation to tell. If we want to avoid a wrong act, we must avoid what leads to it.

Mrs. Wren. Really, Miss Jenny, that is very well bred and considerate in you,—so different

from some people, who must always be prying into every thing, whether it concerns them or not. What would you like to talk about?

Jenny. I was going to ask if the little chipping-bird was related to you.

Mrs. Wren. Not at all. He is properly a bunting; and, though there is some resemblance in our plumage, our habits are very unlike. He is an amiable little fellow; but I don't admire his singing,—which always puts me in mind of grinding scissors. They are wonderfully good-tempered, kind little creatures, who mind their own business and never get into quarrels: so that they are general favourites. Even that noted bully the king-bird can find no subject of quarrel with them. They are industrious, too, and build a very neat and pretty nest.

Jenny. Yes: I have often seen the nest in the currant and raspberry bushes. A gentleman once showed mother a chipping-bird's nest all made of silver wire. I suppose the little bird had found the epaulet of some poor officer who was killed during the war; and she had pulled it all to pieces and twisted the wire

of which it was made, into a nest for her young ones. I have often wondered whether the little things were not proud of their fine nest.

Mrs. Wren. I dare say they never thought of such a thing,—though they might well be proud of having such an ingenious bird for their mother. The chipping-bird likes to weave little bits of paper into the inside of her nest; and once I saw one lined with a long strip of green calico, all twisted round and round; but in general they use horse-hair, which is very clean and cool. There is, however, hardly any sort of string which cannot be worked into a bird's nest. Last year I had a long bit of white ribbon in mine; but it got yellow and dirty, and I threw it away.

Jenny. Does the chipping-bird eat insects?

Mrs. Wren. Yes, and seeds, and almost any little thing that comes along.

Jenny. They love crumbs, I know; for I have often thrown them out on the gravel walk for them, and they seem to pick them up with great pleasure. There is another little bird which looks a good deal like the chipping-bird: I mean the ground-sparrow.

Mrs. Wren. He is a bunting too. Did you ever see his nest?

Jenny. I think I have. He builds on the ground: does he not?

Mrs. Wren. Most commonly,—though once in a great while the nest is placed on the branches of a low shrub. It seems an odd taste for a bird to like to build on the ground; but he conceals his nest pretty well, and I don't think it is often meddled with. The young ones are soon able to run about, and the parents turn them off before they are fairly able to shift for themselves; but, as they find plenty of insects and seeds, they get on better than you would expect. The ground-bird sometimes raises fifteen nestlings in a season. The ground-bird and chipping-bird, as well as the goldfinches, purple finches, linnets and cross-bills, and I don't know how many others, belong to the great finch family, which are scattered all over the world. Have you seen the purple finch this spring? They are not very common birds; but there is almost always a pair about here.

Jenny. I saw him this very day, singing

and frolicking on the apple-tree. He seemed to be in such an ecstasy that he hardly knew what to do with himself, and was fluttering round his mate, singing, spreading out his wings and setting up his cap, while she sat on the bough as demurely as possible. The moment he spied me looking at them, he made a dive at me, as though he meant to pick my eyes out, and seemed determined to drive me away; but when he found that I did not mean to interfere with him he went back to his play again.

Mrs. Wren. I dare say he will build somewhere in the neighbourhood. The goldfinch you know, of course. His gay coat and merry song make him a favourite everywhere. I must say I think he need not be so very proud of his black-velvet and gold, since he neither earned them nor made them. But he is a very sweet singer, and not a bad neighbour; and they look very pretty,—especially in the fall, when they are pulling the thistle-heads to pieces and sending the down flying in clouds all about them. They are great devourers of all sorts of small and hard seeds;

and, in that way, they do a good deal towards keeping down troublesome weeds. That eyesore to a good farmer—a bed of Canada thistles by the roadside—is a mine of wealth to the goldfinches; and there you may see them, with their green-coated mates and little ones, pecking and singing away, all in high glee. They like to build in the garden; and the gardener has no quarrel with them, as they never meddle with fruit, unless it may be a strawberry now and then.

Jenny. I think the goldfinch builds the prettiest nest in the world. It is like a little bowl made of moss and lichens and beautifully lined with soft down. It is just the kind of nest I think I should like if I were a bird.

Mrs. Wren. It is pretty enough, I admit, but then—dear me!—so unprotected. I should not feel safe a moment to have my eggs in such a little dish of a thing. There is nothing to keep out the blue jays,—contemptible egg-suckers that they are; and the cow-bird can get into it and lay her eggs whenever she likes, sure that her foundlings will receive the best of care. They are kind-hearted little crea-

tures, or they would not allow themselves to be so imposed upon. They are very sociable, too. I have often seen a whole flock of them, when on their migrations, alter their course at the call of a single one who may be sitting on a tree in the neighbourhood, and alight to pay him a visit. They always have a little concert upon these occasions. The goldfinch flies in a very pretty and graceful way, rising and falling in long curved lines and singing as he goes. They are always merry; and nothing less than the loss of their mates or their nests seems to put them out of spirits: so that they are very good company.

Jenny. Is the snow-bird a finch?

Mrs. Wren. The real snow-bird is a finch, and related to the sparrows; but he is not so common as the black-cap titmouse, which is usually called the snow-bird in this part of the country. The snow-bird is of a uniform dark-gray colour above, with some white on the under part of his body. The two outer feathers of his tail are also white. They are social birds; but it is a little odd that, though they are so fond of each others' company in

general, no two of them will eat together without quarrelling. They usually breed at the South, but are so shy about their arrangements that very few people have seen either their nest or their eggs. The black-cap titmouse is a far prettier bird. You must often have seen him: indeed, you cannot well miss him in cold weather, for he is always about.

Jenny. Yes: there are dozens of them around the farm-yard and garden every winter. Fanny and I throw out crumbs for them on the snow, and they are always ready to come and pick up the provisions,—though we never can coax them into the house. We think he is a pretty bird.

Mrs. Wren. Yes: his velvet cap gives him quite a jaunty air, and, though his only colours are black, grayish brown and white, his feathers are so close and well kept that he always looks neat and pretty. Coming, too, at a season when no other birds are about, he is sure of a welcome. They are constantly in good spirits, in warm weather or cold. Nothing seems to destroy their gayety

except a lack of food; and, as they will eat almost any thing, they are not very subject to that calamity. In the bleakest winds, when the driving snow feels like needle-points against your skin, you may see the titmouse hanging upside-down upon the end of a branch, pecking at the buds and looking for insects, or running over the bark of the tree singing his "chick-a-dee-dee," over and over again, as if he were in the height of enjoyment.

Jenny. Yes,—I know. The boys very often call them chick-a-dees. I do not think I ever saw the nest of a titmouse.

Mrs. Wren. I presume not; for they are very shy during the breeding-season. They are fond of building in the deserted hole of a woodpecker, which they alter to suit themselves, lining it with an abundance of soft hair; for, though in case of necessity they can make a nest for themselves, they are not very fond of the labour,—to which, indeed, their bills are not well suited. The female lays six or eight small white eggs spotted with red, and the little ones, when hatched, soon assume the

plumage, as well as the consequential airs, of their parents, who are very fond of them and keep them together a long time,—even till the next spring. The titmouse, like myself, is very fond of spiders; and you may often see him hunting for them about the eaves of the house and barn; but nothing in the line of insects, or, indeed, in the eating-line generally, comes amiss to him. Perhaps I should not repeat such a story about a neighbour, but I have heard upon very good authority that he will kill young birds, by picking holes in their skulls, and afterwards devour them. I never saw him do any thing of the kind myself; but I fear it is too true that he has been detected in the act. At any rate, the birds believe it; and this makes them less fond of his company than they otherwise would be. His principal associates are the small woodpeckers, the snow-birds, and other little birds, which spend the winter at the North.

Jenny. I am sorry to hear such a story of the titmouse, who has always been a great favourite of mine. Such conduct seems only

worthy of a jay or a crow. But perhaps it is a mistake, after all.

Mrs. Wren. Possibly; and, at all events, in disbelieving a slanderous story till it is proved, one is certain to err upon the safe side.

Jenny. There is one beautiful bird which I have seen very often this spring, though I do not know its name. It is small and slender, but very elegant in shape; and its plumage is of a soft yellow colour, very close and smooth. There are a good many of them about; and they have built in one of the cherry-trees.

Mrs. Wren. That is the yellow-poll wood-warbler. I wonder you never observed them before; for there are several of them about here every year; but they are rather shy. I think them among the prettiest little birds we have, and their song, though rather monotonous, is very sweet and plaintive. They are sensible little things, too, as they show by their way of disposing of the eggs of the cow-bird. When they find one of these eggs in their nest, they fix a false bottom over it, as it

were, which covers it entirely and prevents its hatching.

Jenny. That is ingenious, certainly. But where is your mate all this time?

Mrs. Wren. I am sure I don't know. He went off half an hour ago to get some crooked sticks and find a spider; and that is the last I have seen of him. Here he comes, at last, to speak for himself. But, dear me! what can have happened to him? My love, what in the world have you done with your tail?

Mr. Wren. You had better ask the cat what she has done with it; for she had it last.

Mrs. Wren. Now, you don't mean to say that you have had a quarrel with the cat?

Mr. Wren. Why, you see, my dear, she was sitting on the boards in the sun, purring, and looking so comfortable that I could not resist the pleasure of teasing her a little: so I just swept down past her and made a snap at her ear. She did not take any notice at first; but finally up she jumped and caught me by the tail-feathers. I can tell you, I thought at that moment I should never see you or the nest again. However, I had no

notion of being made into cat's meat, if I could help it: so, by a desperate struggle, I escaped, as you see, with only the loss of my tail-feathers, which puss carried off in great triumph. I dare say the kittens are playing with them by this time and pretending that they have caught a wren,—which is a thing they never did yet.

Mrs. Wren. It is a thing they will do pretty soon, if you are not more careful. I must really say that a husband and father has no right to be so reckless. If you don't care for your own life, you might at least think what is to become of me.

Mr. Wren. Oh, you would soon get another mate, I dare say. Such a bird as you would never want friends. But come, now, don't fret; for, after all, it is no great loss. I think I shall set a new fashion this summer, and persuade all the birds to lay aside their tails till cold weather. But there are some twigs for you, and a fine fat spider besides: so, you see, I did think of you, after all, my dear.

Mrs. Wren (to Jenny). Did you ever see such a bird? I do believe if he had lost his

head, instead of his tail, he would make out that it was rather an advantage than otherwise.

Mr. Wren. I suppose you want more sticks.

Mrs. Wren. Certainly I do,—if you feel like going after them; but I think you had better sit still and rest, and let me bring a load. I am sure you cannot feel much like work, after all you have been through.

Mr. Wren. Never was better in my life! Besides, I want to show that old cat that I am not dead yet, nor likely to be. But you can go with me if you like.

Mrs. Wren. I believe I will; for I am sure I shall not have an easy moment while you are out of my sight. Good-by, Miss Jenny.

The mishap detailed above really happened, as described, to a wren which had its nest in an oyster-can nailed up on the willow which hung over our kitchen-door. The steps formed a favourite basking-place for our large gray cat; and the wrens never lost an opportunity of insulting him, even going so far as to peck his ears when he was asleep in the sun-

shine. Tom (who was decidedly a philosopher in his way) bore this treatment for a long time with calm contempt; but one day he lost his temper at some unusually outrageous affront, and, watching his opportunity, seized the cock-bird by the tail. Kitty Wren scolded and screamed, and Dicky Wren struggled for his life and finally succeeded in getting away with only the loss of his tail. He was, if possible, more impudent than ever afterwards; but Tom never attempted any other revenge, and, though the box was easily within his reach, he allowed the wrens to bring up their numerous family in peace and safety.

Any child can derive a great deal of amusement from nailing up a wren-box in the spring, near a window or door where it can be conveniently observed. An oyster-can makes an excellent box; but they do not object to a cocoanut-shell with the top sawed off, and have been known to build in a wide-mouthed bottle. Audubon's beautiful picture shows a family of them very nicely accommodated in an old hat with a hole cut in the crown. They soon become exceedingly familiar,—not to say impu-

dent; and their doings afford endless entertainment to a spectator,—especially after the young ones make their appearance. The same pair return to the nest year after year, repairing and altering it with great importance and industry. They are exceedingly fond and affectionate to each other: nevertheless, should one of a pair be destroyed, the survivor loses no time in providing him or her self with a new helpmate, who at once assumes all the labours of the family.

Audubon has the following remarks upon the familiarity of the black-cap titmouse, or chick-a-dee:—

“The black-cap titmouse,—or chick-a-dee, as it is generally named in our Eastern States,—though extremely shy in summer or during the breeding-season, becomes quite familiar in winter,—though it never ventures to enter the habitations of man; but in the most boisterous weather, requiring neither food nor shelter it may be seen amid the snow in the most rugged paths of the cheerless woods, where it welcomes the traveller or wood-cutter with a confidence and cheerfulness far surpassing the well-known familiarity of the robin.

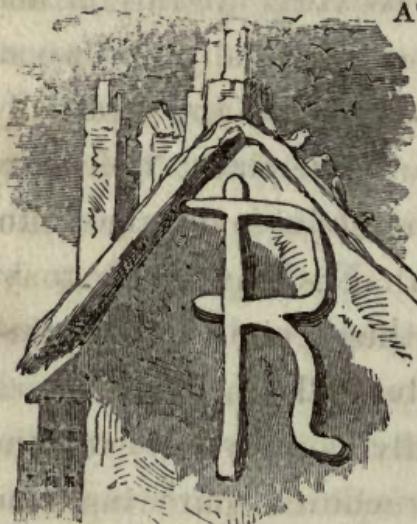
redbreast of Europe. Often, on such occasions, should you offer it no matter how small a portion of your fare, it alights without hesitation and devours it without apprehension. The sound of an axe in the woods is sufficient to bring forth several of these busy creatures; and, having discovered the woodman, they seem to find pleasure in his company. If (as is usually the case) he is provided with a dinner, the chick-a-dee at once evinces his anxiety to partake of it, and loses no opportunity of accomplishing its object; although it sets about it with as much circumspection as if it were afraid of being detected and brought to punishment. A wood-cutter in Maine assured me that one day he happened to be at work, and had hardly hung up his basket of provisions when it was observed by a flock of these birds, which, having gathered into it, at once attacked a piece of cold beef; but after every peck he saw them raise their heads above the edge, as if to guard against the least appearance of danger. After picking until they were tired or satisfied, they left the basket and perched directly over the fire, but out of

the direction of the smoke. There they sat, enjoying themselves, and ruffling their feathers to allow the warmth more easy access to their skin, till he began his dinner,—when they alighted near him, and, in the most plaintive tones, seemed to beg a portion."

Audubon confirms the story of the chick-a-dees attacking and devouring young birds. Their bills are quite capable of inflicting a blow hard enough to fracture the skull of such a prey,—as they are perfectly well able to break a hazel-nut, and, indeed, seem to take pleasure in such a feat. Nothing in the way of food comes amiss to them; and I have sometimes thrown out crumbs to them, and watched with great pleasure their enjoyment of the feast. They may be rendered quite tame in winter by regularly supplying them with food. They soon learn when and where to seek for it, and, though they will never suffer a near approach, they will twitter their gratitude in a very pleasing way.

CHAPTER VII.

A SKILFUL CARPENTER.



AT—tat—tat! That is a famous tree, now! I call that a tree to be proud of,—sound enough to be perfectly safe for years to come, and yet well filled with insects. The neighbourhood, too, is a

reasonably good one. There are three orchards close at hand, and all well furnished, not only with fall and winter apples, but also with the best varieties of cherries,—not to mention plums and pears. Really, a fruit-growing country is a delightful residence, and might be much pleasanter if men were not so stingy as to want to keep every thing to themselves.

However, they cannot be always on the watch,—that is one comfort; and so I bring home many a ripe cherry and apple to my family, in spite of them.

Jenny. You seem to be in good spirits this morning.

Woodpecker. I am not often out of spirits, my dear, and should be very ungrateful and unreasonable if I were; for really we wood-peckers are very happy creatures, especially we red-heads. In the first place, there are few birds whose plumage is more beautiful than our's; not that that is any thing to be proud of, though, of course, one would rather be handsome than ugly. The brilliant red of our heads is splendidly contrasted with the glossy black and pure white of our wings and bodies; and our feathers have a remarkable lustre. Then, we are so strong and healthy, and so perfectly fitted for our way of life, that it is nothing but a pleasure to dig out our holes and search for insects. To be sure, we sometimes have to abandon one hole and dig another; but then we have plenty of places to choose from, and, if one hole won't do,

another will. As to food, hardly any thing comes amiss to us. Wherever one sees a dead or decaying tree, there is the wood-pecker's meat-safe and pantry, with plenty of fresh provisions to be had for the taking. If the insect does not appear at once, rat-tat-tat! it is only to rap the wood smartly, and then lay one's head to the bark to find out his whereabouts, and in another moment out he comes, speared by my long, barbed tongue. If one is tired of insects, there is always plenty of fruit of one sort or another; and when the green corn is richest and fullest of milk, who can dig through the husks and pull out the sweet, juicy kernels better than I?

Jenny. And get shot by the farmer for your pains?

Woodpecker. Yes: now and then one of us dies in that way, it is true; but what then? We must all come to an end sooner or later; and for one red-head that is shot, a hundred live to a good old age. By-and-by come the apples; and what is better than a sweet, juicy apple or pear? and we woodpeckers

know how to pick out the best, I can tell you.

Jenny. Yes: I have always observed that an apple which has been tasted by you is sure to be the best on the tree.

Woodpecker. Well, generally, but not always; because we have a knack of sticking our open bills into the sides of them and flying away with them to feast at our leisure; and we naturally choose the ripest for that purpose. We can help ourselves to an egg in the same way now and then; but we don't often do that.

Jenny. I am glad to hear you say so; for sucking eggs always seemed to me a mean business.

Woodpecker. I don't know that it is worse than eating them in any other way. I see Jemmy bring in his hat full of eggs from the barn almost every morning. But, not to dispute about that, I suppose you know how we make our nests.

Jenny. Indeed I do not. I never saw a woodpecker's nest in my life.

Woodpecker. You are looking at one this

very moment,—only you don't know what it is. There, close under that mossy branch—

Jenny. I see nothing but a round, smooth hole, which seems to run for some distance into the wood.

Woodpecker. That is just what I want you to see. There is my nest, where I have lived happily every summer for six years, and where I hope to spend many more pleasant seasons with my mate.

Jenny. But is it not a great deal of trouble to dig such a deep hole in the hard timber?

Woodpecker. It would be so for a robin or a chipping-bird, but not for me. See how strong and sharp my bill is, and how nicely my claws are adapted for clinging to the bark, while my stiff tail helps to support the weight of my body, so that I stand and peck away as securely as a carpenter on a scaffold. Then there is all the time the pleasant thought that I am preparing a residence and a home for my dear wife and family, to make the work lighter. Besides, I don't have to make a new nest every year, as some birds do: the same hole serves

me for a lifetime, unless some accident happens to it.

Jenny. I should not think it would be particularly subject to accidents.

Woodpecker. Why, sometimes a tree is blown down or becomes water-soaked, or a pair of crow-blackbirds get possession of the hole before us; but generally, as I said, we use the same habitation year after year,—only cleaning it out and sometimes deepening it a little.

Jenny. What lining do you put in your nest?

Woodpecker. None whatever. My mate lays her pure-white eggs and hatches them on the soft, powdery wood. Like almost all birds, we are very kind and attentive to our young ones, feeding them with insects and worms, and then, as they get larger, supplying them with fruit, till they are able to go out and help themselves. We raise two broods in a season. The greatest enemy to our domestic peace is the black-snake, which frequently climbs the tree to our nest, enters it in spite of all our efforts, sucks our eggs or swallows our little ones before our eyes, and

then coils himself up in the nest, where he remains for several days, much at his ease, digesting his ill-gotten meal. More than one naughty boy has got a good fright when, having put his thievish fingers into a woodpecker's hole, he has pulled out, not a soft young bird, but a frightful black reptile. Cats and such creatures trouble us very little, as they cannot make their way into our holes.

Jenny. I have seen some woodpeckers with gray heads instead of red ones.

Woodpecker. Those are our young ones, which do not fully acquire their red caps till they are a year old. Towards the end of their first year, you may see them with their gray and red feathers so curiously mixed that one who did not know the truth might easily take them for another species.

Jenny. Where do you go in winter?

Woodpecker. To the Southern States, and sometimes even farther. When on our annual migration, we always fly at night, and spend the day in resting and feeding. We fly high in the air, travelling in very open order,—as the soldiers say; and even when we are quite

out of sight you may hear the call-note by which we regulate our motions. We return in spring in the same way, and make our appearance in these parts about the 1st of May, to remain till the middle of October or something later. All through the latter part of summer and the fall you may see us frolicking about the dead trees and fences, dodging around the rails, rattling our bills and playing at hide-and-seek with each other; while we have always a salutation for every passing wayfarer. As we find no difficulty in running over the bark of a tree in any direction, we often elude our enemy, man, even when armed with a gun, by keeping constantly on the opposite side of a tree or stump, till we find an opportunity of sailing off to another one.

Jenny. I have often admired your habit of flying in large sweeps from tree to tree, as if you were in a great swing. But does it not injure the trees very much to have holes bored in them?

Woodpecker. Not at all. In the first place, we red-heads seldom make a nest in a living tree,—never, if we can find a dead one at all

suited to our purpose. Secondly, all our other probings and searchings are for insects, which breed between the bark and the wood. These insects destroy what is called the sap-wood, in which the sap circulates,—which, you know, is the life-blood of the tree,—and, if they were suffered to increase at will, would soon destroy it entirely. I have known nearly two thousand acres of pine land rendered nearly worthless by the ravages of a small black beetle, ninety out of a hundred trees being destroyed. It is for these and similar pests that the woodpecker is hunting when you see him rap the bark with his bill and then lay his head close to listen. His quick ear soon detects the motion of the alarmed insect shrinking into its hiding-place, and out it comes in a moment, transfixed by his barbed tongue.

Jenny. I should think that the woodpecker might justly be called a very useful bird.

Woodpecker. He certainly deserves the title; and men need not grudge him his wages,—which I must admit he is by no means backward in taking. But there is another small

woodpecker which suffers still more from injustice than ourselves, and with even less shadow of reason; since he destroys many insects which injure man's property, while he never touches any thing that can be of any use to him. I mean the small downy woodpecker, or sap-sucker, as he is commonly called.

Jenny. What a singular name!

Woodpecker. It is not only singular, but undeserved. The downy woodpecker is one of the most industrious and pains-taking creatures in the world. Unlike most other birds, he remains in this country all winter, and may be seen even in the coldest weather, in company with the chick-a-dee and the nut-hatch, running over the naked branches in search of insects. About the 1st of May he begins to make his nest. He commences the work by marking out on the bark a perfect circle, exactly the size of his body. This done, he begins to dig, the male and female helping each other with the greatest sociability and good nature, carrying off the chips and scattering them at a distance to prevent discovery. They generally dig horizontally or in a slant-

ing direction for six or eight inches, and then straight downward for eight or ten more,—polishing their work as smoothly as a cabinet-maker could do it. As the work approaches completion, the female becomes very anxious and excited about it, passing in and out and examining it in all directions. They are not always allowed, however, to enjoy the fruit of their labours in peace. The meddling, impudent house-wrens often watch the movements of the woodpeckers, and when they perceive the work to have advanced far enough to suit their own purposes, they make no scruple of driving away the rightful owners and taking possession of the holes themselves. The poor little woodpeckers are sometimes obliged to bore three or four holes in succession before they are allowed to make themselves a home.

Jenny. But why do not they resist and drive the wrens away?

Woodpecker. Oh, they are peaceable little creatures, and would rather give up their rights than fight for them any day. But, supposing the nest to be happily finished, the

female lays six white eggs on the bare, smooth wood, and begins the task of sitting, while her mate keeps watch over her safety, feeds her, and now and then takes her place while she indulges in a little excursion. The young are soon hatched, and before many days are able to follow their parents about the tree, where they feed upon insects of all sorts. They are particularly fond of frequenting old apple-trees, piercing the bark with great numbers of holes, arranged in regular circles round the tree and close together. It is this habit which has given to them the name of sap-suckers. People suppose that they perforate the wood to drink the sap, and thus injure the tree; whereas the fact is that they dig out the insects which are found in the sap-wood. That they do not injure the tree seems to be clearly shown by the fact that it is always the healthiest trees and the most abundant bearers which are found pierced by them. Moreover, if the sap were their object, they would be more likely to seek it in the spring, when it flows abundantly, than in the latter end of summer and the fall. The hairy woodpecker

is very similar in his habits, and is often confounded with his downy cousin.

Jenny. That is very interesting. I shall watch them with new pleasure, now that I know what they are about. I have seen a beautiful large woodpecker that the boys call a yellow-hammer; but my father calls it a flicker. The under-side of its wings and all the quills were of a bright, golden yellow; but the feathers themselves were mottled with brown. It seemed to be a very merry bird; for it was laughing and chuckling all the time that I watched it.

Woodpecker. That is properly called the golden-winged woodpecker. As you say, he is both merry and handsome. He is one of the largest woodpeckers of this continent, and goes by different names in different parts of the country. Like ourselves, he spends his winters in the Southern States,—though now and then a pair stand out the cold season in Pennsylvania. They travel by night, and fly in a more direct course than woodpeckers in general. The golden-winged woodpecker is a famous workman, and excavates a hole some

twelve or fifteen inches deep,—often selecting the hardest wood for the purpose. The male and female work together at this business, which they pursue in very easy style, stopping often to rest and play, chasing each other around the branches, catching insects and hunting for ants,—of which they are very fond: so that it is often four weeks before the hole is fully completed. The female lays six or eight eggs, and sometimes more. As soon as the young ones are able to see, the parents try to coax them out upon the branches; but this is often a matter of great difficulty; and the mother sometimes has to resort to the severe expedient of starving them out, before they will abandon their birthplace. When they are once abroad in the air, however, they seem to enjoy themselves amazingly, and soon follow their parents everywhere in search of food,—of which they find an abundance, as every ant-hill is a mine of wealth to them. Later in the summer they resort to the corn-fields, where they help themselves plentifully, and where a good many of them lose their lives. After the corn is housed, they

visit the cribs and barns, and often descend to the ground to pick up the grains dropped by the cattle. On the whole, they are very well off; and if I were not a red-head I think I should like to be a golden-wing.

Jenny. Are there any other woodpeckers than those you have mentioned?

Woodpecker. Plenty of them,—more than I can tell you of or than you would care to hear. There is the pileated woodpecker, or log-cock, as he is often called,—who lives only in the woods, and is rather a surly, unsociable fellow,—the red-bellied, and ever so many others, besides two more interesting than any I have yet mentioned: I mean the ivory-billed woodpecker and the Californian carpenter-woodpecker.

Jenny. I should like very much to hear of them. I do not think I ever saw or heard of the ivory-billed woodpecker.

Woodpecker. He is not found about here. If you want to see him, you must go down to the deep cypress-swamps of the Southern States, where the giant trees grow up out of the wet ground sometimes to the height of

a hundred feet or more,—many of them dead, and bleached like old bones, or covered with long, gray, hanging moss. But you must mind how you step; for the ground is treacherous about here. That bed of green moss, which looks so soft and inviting to your foot, covers a pool of black water deep enough to drown you; while that other inky pond is haunted by the alligator, the moccasin-snake and the water rattlesnake. Be careful of that dry knoll, too; for the copper-head likes to bask upon it, and his bite is certain death. Never mind the mosquitoes and sand-flies: there are millions of them filling the air; and the only way is to get used to them, if you can.

Jenny. I think I would rather stay at home, if you please. The country does not seem a very inviting one.

Woodpecker. Not to you, perhaps; but to the creatures who inhabit it, it is a paradise. This desolate wilderness is the favourite home and haunt of the ivory-billed woodpecker. Here, in some live tree, he makes his house, fixing its entrance under a projecting branch

to keep out the driving rain, and digging perhaps three feet into the solid wood. There he finds abundance of delicious food in every dead or decaying tree. And you may see him climbing about with as much ease as you would walk on the grass, digging and hammering, and, at every stroke of his hard, white and polished bill, knocking off pieces of bark six or seven inches long. In this way he will sometimes strip a tree of its bark for some thirty inches in extent in a few hours. The ground at the foot of the tree looks as if a carpenter had been at work; and, in fact, he is sometimes called the carpenter, as well as the Californian.

Jenny. He must be rather a mischievous fellow, I should think.

Woodpecker. On the contrary, he is exceedingly useful, and saves hundreds of trees from destruction every year. You will observe that it is only the dead and decaying trees which he attacks: with the sound ones he has nothing to do, except to make his nest in one,—which does not injure it at all. Those noble evergreen trees are infested with an insect

not larger than a grain of rice, which is as fatal to them as the cholera or the plague is to man; and it is these creatures which the ivory-billed woodpecker searches for and destroys by thousands. Even when living in the neighbourhood of human habitations, he never meddles with corn, and seldom attacks cultivated fruit,—though he likes a few wild berries now and then. He does not migrate, but inhabits his dreary swamp all the year round. He is the largest of the family,—being twenty inches long, while his wings spread thirty inches. His plumage is an elegant and curious mixture of white, yellow and black, the head being adorned with a splendid red crest. His bill, as his name imports, is like ivory, being white, very hard, elegantly polished and fluted and prodigiously strong; while the tongue has a tip or barb of the same substance, about half an inch long. He and his mate are very fond of each other, help each other in all their labours, and are almost constantly in conversation; but his voice is not agreeable, being rather harsh, and sounding, when he is alarmed or wounded,

exactly like the violent crying of a young child. The female lays six eggs, as large as those of a pullet, and the young ones leave their nest long before they are able to fly. The Indians admire him very much for his strength and spirit, and use his head and bill as an amulet or charm, decorating their dresses with them. He is indeed very brave, and even when mortally wounded will defend himself with great spirit, often inflicting a severe wound upon the hand that approaches to take him. Should he succeed in gaining a tree, he is lost to the sportsman; for he will cling to the tree with such force as not to fall even for several hours after death.

Jenny. He must be a noble bird; but I would rather take your description than visit him at home among his snakes and alligators. But now for the other.

Woodpecker. The Californian woodpecker is about my own size, and, indeed, seems to take the same place upon the Pacific side of this continent that the red-head occupies upon the Atlantic coast, being found very abundantly from Oregon to the Isthmus of Darien.

He is a handsome bird, elegantly variegated with black and white and set off by a fine yellow collar and a red crest. Like all woodpeckers, he digs a hole for his nest and is fond of feasting on ants and other small insects; but what chiefly distinguishes him is his habit of laying up a stock of provisions for winter, which he accomplishes in a manner different from any other bird or beast of my acquaintance. All summer long, you may see the woodpecker, with his wife and family, and every neighbour that he can muster, tap—tap—tapping about the tall Californian pines, filling the thick, soft bark of that noble tree with innumerable holes, about the size of a good big thimble. It seems a great waste of energy and time; but our woodpecker knows well what he is about. As it draws towards the close of the warm season, and the high winds begin to blow, the large, delicious, sweet acorns begin to rattle down from the trees, and cover the ground. The woodpecker laughs for joy as he sees them falling; but he does not cease his work, for he knows how much he has to do before cold weather comes.

Down he goes to the ground, and begins to turn over the acorns. That looks like a fine one. You would say he could not make a better choice. But it does not suit him; and, rejecting it with contempt, he tries another and another, till he finds one to his mind. You can see no difference in them; but the wood-pecker knows very well that the first one had a maggot in the core, which would soon spoil the kernel. Well, he is satisfied at last, and flies away with the acorn he has selected. There he goes, half flying, half scrambling around the trunk, till he has found a hole of exactly the right size, when, tap—tap! the acorn is inserted, and fitted tightly into its place, where it looks something like a large, brass-headed nail; and away he goes for another. All the woodpeckers in the neighbourhood are equally busy; and by the time cold weather sets in, the pine-tree bark holds a great store of acorns, each in its own little case. These remain untouched till snow falls; but when the ground is covered, and neither berry nor insect are to be seen, the woodpeckers resort to their store-house, and,

pecking a hole in the end of the acorn, eat out the inside as nicely as you would scrape an egg out of the shell.

But the squirrel likes acorns, as well as the woodpecker; and I regret to say that he is often guilty of the meanness of robbing the hard-working birds and carrying off for his own use their hardly-earned stores. In vain the poor woodpeckers scold and threaten. Bunny pays no attention to their remonstrances, but, with as grave a face as though he were about some meritorious action, he runs up the tree, fills his cheek-pouches with acorns, and away he goes to his hole. Fortunately for themselves, the woodpeckers always put up five times as many acorns as they can possibly use: so that, notwithstanding the depredations of this little thief, they never fall short. But good-by, my dear: I must go and relieve my mate, who has been working very patiently all the time I have been talking with you. I must not let her do all the labour, or I shall be as bad as the squirrels I have been abusing.

Mr. Wilson gives the following amusing

account of an adventure with an ivory-billed woodpecker:—

“The first place I observed this bird at, when on my way South, was about twelve miles north of Wilmington, in North Carolina. There I found the bird from which the drawing was taken. This bird was only wounded slightly in the wing, and, on being caught, uttered a loudly-reiterated and most piteous note, exactly resembling the violent crying of a young child,—which terrified my horse so as nearly to have cost me my life. It was distressing to hear it. I carried it with me in the chair, under cover, to Wilmington. Its affecting cries surprised every one within hearing, particularly the females, who hurried to the doors and windows with looks of alarm and anxiety. I drove on, and, arriving at the piazza of the hotel where I intended to put up, the landlord came forward, with a number of other persons who happened to be there, all equally alarmed at what they had heard. This was greatly increased by my asking whether he could furnish me with accommodations for myself and my baby. The man looked

blank and foolish, while the others stared with still greater astonishment. After diverting myself for a minute or two at their expense, I drew my woodpecker from under the cover, and a general laugh took place. I took him up-stairs, and locked him up in my room while I went to see my horse taken care of. In less than an hour I returned, when he set up the same distressing shout,—which now appeared to proceed from grief that he had been discovered in his attempt to escape. He had mounted along the window nearly as high as the ceiling, a little below which he had begun to break through. The bed was covered with large pieces of plaster, the lath was exposed for at least fifteen inches square, and a hole large enough to admit the fist opened to the weather-boards: so that in less than another hour he would certainly have succeeded in making his way through. I now tied a string round his leg, and, fastening it to the table, again left him. I wished to preserve his life, and had gone off in search of suitable food for him. As I reascended the stairs, I heard him again hard at work, and on entering had the

mortification to perceive that he had almost ruined the mahogany table to which he was fastened, and on which he had wreaked his whole vengeance. While engaged in making the drawing, he cut me severely in several places, and, on the whole, displayed such a noble and unconquerable spirit that I was frequently tempted to restore him to his native woods. He lived with me nearly three days, but refused all sustenance; and I witnessed his death with regret."

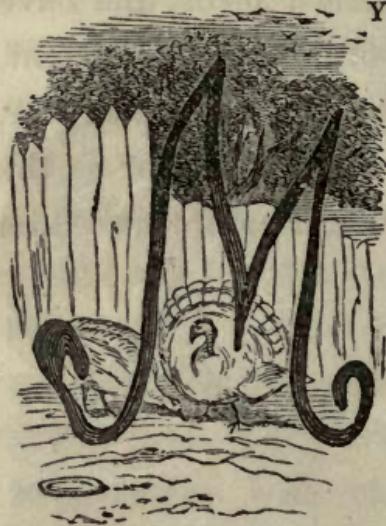
Wilson had a golden-winged woodpecker, which was a much more amiable subject, and, after some days' confinement, became tame and sociable, seeming to enjoy his food and the society of his master. Audubon says that they thrive well in confinement, and adds that they will destroy as much furniture in a day as a different sort of workman could mend in a week,—a trait which would seem to make them more expensive pets than most of us would care about keeping. The golden-winged woodpecker is often called the yellow-hammer in some parts of the country.

The red-headed woodpecker now and then

makes his appearance even in the streets of a shady city, when one hears his jolly cackle above all the rattle of the carts over the stones. I have never seen them abundant enough to do any serious mischief in the garden or orchard,—though they sometimes visit the cherry-trees, as does also the yellow-hammer. They are among our prettiest birds, and have a remarkable expression of life and enjoyment. The small downy woodpecker, or sap-sucker, is almost as frequent a winter visitor as the chick-a-dee, though his quieter habits make him less conspicuous.

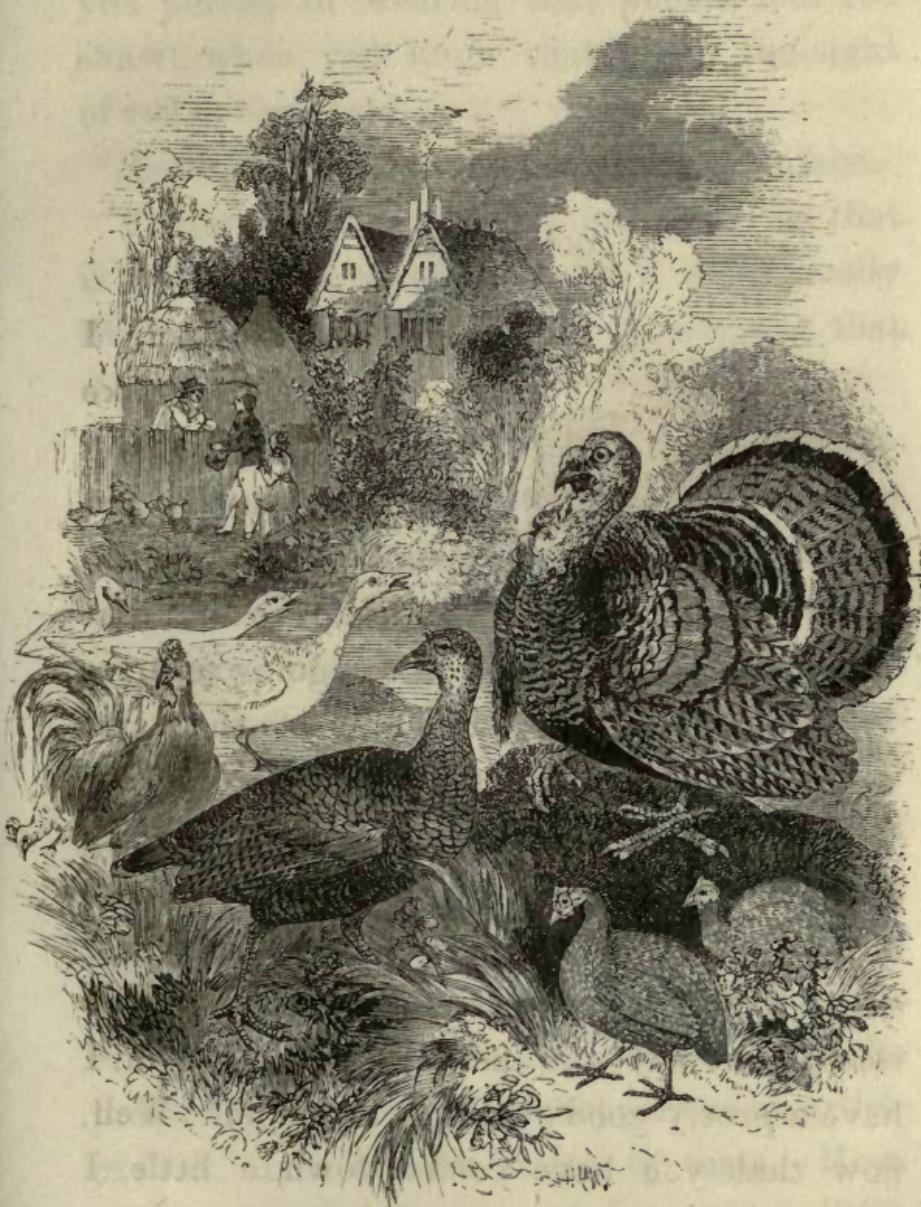
CHAPTER VIII.

COCK TURKEY.



Y good Mr. Turkey, I should very much like to know the meaning of all that strutting and gobbling of your's. Do you really think that you are going to drive me out of the barnyard by spreading out your feathers, setting up your tail and growing as red in the face as a ripe tomato? I am older than I was last summer, and not so easily alarmed; and, besides, you may not, perhaps, observe that I have a pretty good switch in my hand. Well, now that you have cooled down a little, I should like to know the meaning of all this parade.

Jenny and the Birds.



Turkey. And I should like to know why you persist in wearing that abominable red shawl, when you know that I hate the sight of red everywhere.

Jenny. Except, perhaps, in your own face.

Turkey. I cannot see my own face: so that is no exception whatever. But I should really like to ask why you persist in wearing that thing.

Jenny. Why, the shawl is a very nice one, convenient in size, and just about warm enough; and it seems to me unreasonable that I should be expected to give it up because of an absurd prejudice on your part, for which you do not seem able to give any reason whatever.

Turkey. Well, I hate the sight of red. I always did, from the very egg; and every turkey in the world has the same feeling. It is natural for us; but I can no more give a reason for it than you can give a reason for preferring oysters to grasshoppers as an article of food. It is a mere matter of taste. However, if the shawl has so many good qualities, I suppose I must get used to it,—especially as

it is my good little friend Miss Jenny that wears it.

Jenny. That is spoken like a sensible bird. See; here are some bits of meat for you, and some strawberries besides. That is a treat you don't get every day.

Turkey. No, indeed! I have not tasted a strawberry before this season. I think I will take a ramble out to the field to-morrow and see if I can find any wild ones. They used to be very abundant over in the meadow. This country must have been a perfect paradise for turkeys when it was new.

Jenny. Why so?

Turkey. Because it abounded so in wild berries. There were blue-berries and whortle-berries on the hill-sides and in the openings, strawberries in the meadow, squaw-berries and winter-greens in the wood, and cranberries by the bushel in the marshes,—besides others not so abundant. Why, even now you may pick squawberries by the handful in the woods; and in the fall and early in spring, after the snows have gone off, the winter-green berries quite reddens the ground in some

places. Then there were wild grapes down by the river, and blackberries all round the open spaces in the woods. Oh, yes: the wild turkeys must have had splendid times, before the white men came to drive them and the Indians away together.

Jenny. I did not know that turkeys were found wild in this country before it was settled by the whites. I have heard of wild turkeys; but I always supposed them to be tame turkeys which had run away to the woods and become wild.

Turkey. On the contrary, tame turkeys are birds that have been brought into the farm-yard and tamed. Turkeys were carried to Europe from Mexico in the sixteenth century, and soon became common all over the world.

Jenny. Are there any wild turkeys about here now?

Turkey. Oh, no: they all disappeared from this region long ago. If you wish to see them in their native haunts, you must go as far west as Tennessee and Kentucky, or even farther; for I understand they are

becoming more and more scarce every year. If they were not very intelligent birds, they would soon be extirpated; but, after being hunted a while, they become so exceedingly wary and knowing that it is not always easy even for a good hunter to shoot them. Still, a great many are killed every year, both by guns and traps; and perhaps the time is not very far distant when not one will be found on this continent.

Jenny. That seems rather a pity. Is the wild turkey-cock as handsome as the tame?

Turkey. Much handsomer. The general colour of the plumage is a rich brown or bronze colour, glossed with splendid metallic purple reflections. Each feather is marked with a band of deep velvet black, and many of them (especially of the tail) are crossed with alternate bands of green and black. The head is covered with a rough red and blue skin, naked and adorned with numerous carbuncles; and the wattles are red, changing to blue; while from the breast hangs a long tuft of hairy feathers. The hen is much graver in her colours, and does not acquire the breast-

tuft till she is considerably advanced in life. It is curious to see some twenty or thirty of these gobblers, called together by the call or yelp of a hen, strutting about within the compass of a few yards, their tails set up, their feathers expanded and bristling, and their heads glowing with purple, blue and crimson. If one of them happens to jostle another, a fight immediately follows, which frequently ends in the death of one of the combatants,— perhaps of both; for the sly lynx or wild-cat watches his opportunity, and, while the victor is treading his antagonist under foot and triumphing over him, he finds himself suddenly seized in the claws and jaws of a more relentless and powerful conqueror than himself.

Like domestic fowls and other birds of that class, the wild turkeys do not pair, but each gobbler is followed by his little family of hens. The hen is very careful to conceal her eggs from the gobbler, whose instincts lead him to destroy them all, whenever he can find them. For the same reason, she keeps the young brood out of his way till they are able to take care of themselves.

The turkey-hen is a very careful mother. Whenever she leaves her nest for a few moments, she covers it carefully with leaves and sticks, and always returns to it by an indirect route, that her purpose may not be suspected. Sometimes two or three hens will join together and all lay their eggs in the same nest,—in which case one of them always remains upon guard during the absence of the others, to defend the common treasure from prowling animals, such as raccoons, opossums, skunks and even wild-cats, which suck the eggs as well as devour the birds.

The hen turkey sits three weeks; and, as the time of hatching draws nigh, her cares and anxieties are redoubled, so that she will hardly leave the nest on any consideration. Hen turkeys have even been found starved to death on their nests; and the hunter sometimes takes advantage of this trait to capture both the mother and her nestlings, by building an enclosure around her as she sits,—the poor bird, though aware of their purpose, preferring captivity with her little ones to death without them.

Jenny. Poor things! It seems too bad to

take such an advantage of their faithfulness. But supposing that all goes on well, and nothing happens to disturb her: what then?

Turkey. When the important moment for which she has so anxiously waited at length arrives, the hen turkey may be observed to rise on her feet, look sideways under her, and utter a peculiar cluck. She hears the first faint chirp of the young birds, and knows that they are striving to break the shell. Carefully she assists them in the task, clearing away the fragments of the shell, drying the tender hairy down which covers their little bodies, and caressing them with every manifestation of pleasure. Soon they are able to stand alone and to walk; and, while the careful mother's confinement is at an end, her cares are redoubled. She now leads her little ones upon a short excursion, turning her watchful eyes first upward, then from side to side, that no hawk may snatch away her darlings or prowling wild-cat make them his prey. For two or three nights they return to the nest to sleep,—after which she leads them to the higher ground, to be out of the way of the damp, which is very

fatal to them. Young turkeys, as I observed, are covered only with a thin, hairy down; and if this becomes wet through they are almost certain to die. At this period the mother gathers the spicy buds of the moose-bush for her little ones,—just as our careful housewives put pepper-corns down their throats. In a short time the young ones become strong enough to perch, and the whole family at nightfall seek out some strong, low-growing limb, where, gathered under each side of their mother and partly covered by her broad wings, they sleep in safety during the hours of darkness. By fall they are able to take care of themselves, and associate together in considerable flocks. In some places the turkey raises two broods in a season; but it is not common for them to do so.

Jenny. What becomes of the gobblers all this time?

Turkey. They are living very retired in the woods, spending much of their time in lying concealed by the side of fallen logs and in other coverts. At this season they are very thin and covered with vermin; and the Indians

have a proverb, “As lean as a turkey in summer.” Towards the end of the hot season they begin to recover their spirits; and in October—which the Indians call the moon of turkeys—they are in very good case, and able to begin their travels.

Jenny. Do they then migrate?

Turkey. Properly speaking, they are not birds of passage; but they often perform tolerably long journeys in search of their favourite food,—acorns, beech-nuts and wild fruits. When they come to a wide river they seem to be somewhat disconcerted, and spend two or three days upon its banks, purring, gobbling and apparently consulting what is best to be done. At last, on a fine morning, the whole flock ascend to the top of the tallest trees in the neighbourhood of the river, from which, at a given signal,—namely, a cluck from the oldest gobbler of the party,—they all take wing for the farther shore. The old ones reach it easily enough; but it often happens that some of the younger and feebler of the party fall into the water. You would think they must certainly be drowned. But no:

closing their wings, they swim very expertly to the nearest landing-place, or, if one is not at hand, they allow themselves to float with the current till they find some convenient spot, and struggle out. After such a passage, they often seem bewildered, and spend two or three days in rambling about, as though at a loss what to do next. As soon as they find a place where food abounds, their journey comes to an end. The turkey searches for food by scratching with his foot among the fallen leaves and rubbish, keeping at the same time a bright look-out for enemies; and in this way he often lays bare a circle of considerable extent. This sometimes proves an unlucky habit for the bird; for the hunter easily discovers these bare places from a distance, and, if the tracks be fresh, he knows, as well as if he had seen them, that there are turkeys in the neighbourhood. The birds are much prized as food, and are taken in many ways, either by shooting or in a turkey-trap.

Jenny. What is that?

Turkey. It is built somewhat like a log

house, only smaller and of lighter sticks, and is securely covered in at the top. Into this enclosure a trench is dug, leading under the logs, just deep enough for a turkey to pass through comfortably, and rising gradually to the level of the ground outside; while over the inner extremity, close to the walls of the pen, the trapper builds a little bridge. He then proceeds to bait his trap, by scattering corn in the pen and trench with a liberal hand, gradually diminishing the quantity as he approaches the outer extremity, and dropping a kernel here and there for some distance into the wood. The turkeys soon discover the dainty, and follow up the tempting but dangerous path till they find themselves within the pen. Having satisfied their hunger or eaten all that they can get, they begin, for the first time, to look about them, and soon discover that they are in a trap. True, the way is open, and there is nothing to prevent their walking out as they walked in; but the silly creatures never think of that. So stupid are they that they will cross a dozen times the bridge which covers the inner end

of the trench, and not once think of looking down to see how they came there; and if the hunter should omit to visit his traps, the whole party may die of starvation.

Jenny. Silly creatures! What makes them do so?

Turkey. That I cannot tell you, any more than I can give you the reason why the old gander and all his family always duck their heads as they pass under the bridge, though it is ten feet above them. It is certain that there are several things about which the wild turkey does not seem to show much sense. Thus, a whole flock may be shot down from a tree on a moonlight night in winter, if the hunter will only take the precaution to aim first at the lowest on the tree. As the body of their companion falls, the others raise themselves a little and utter a slight purr of surprise, as though they thought it rather an unaccountable occurrence; but they never make any attempt to fly away. They are sometimes caught by means of a pipe made of one of the bones taken from the second joint of the wing. By drawing the air through this

tube, a noise is produced similar to the call or yelp of the hen turkey,—on hearing which the gobbler immediately approaches, and becomes an easy prey. In districts where they are much hunted, however, they become, as I have said, exceedingly wary, and the imitation must then be very perfect to deceive them. The turkey often shows considerable address in defending himself from the attacks of the great Virginian owl. This midnight plunderer, sailing along as silently as a spirit, espies the tree where a flock of turkeys have roosted, and promises himself a fine supper. Swiftly and cautiously he approaches the tree; but, cunning as he is, he finds himself foiled. Some one of the turkeys is sure to be on the alert, and, as the shadowy form of the visitor catches his eye, he utters a loud *cluck*, which alarms all his neighbours. The owl, meantime, has made choice of a victim, and comes down on him like lightning; but the turkey is too quick for him, and, squatting down, he throws up the stiff feathers of his tail, turning them completely over his back. The baffled owl slides off the smooth and slanting

surface, and the turkey drops to the ground unharmed.

Jenny. That is very ingenious, certainly. But now, if we have done with the wild turkeys, can you tell me what has become of the tame ones? I have not seen either of the white hens for two or three days; and I am afraid that something has happened to them.

Turkey. You need not be alarmed; for they are both safe enough. One of them is sitting, and the other is off in the pasture somewhere with twelve or fourteen little ones. They keep up their old sly habits, and always hide their nests and little ones if they possibly can. This dry weather is very favourable to the chicks; and I should not wonder if their mother raised them all. I forgot to tell you that in severe weather the wild turkey will come even into the barn-yard and mix with the poultry; and a very fine variety is obtained by crossing the wild breed with the tame. The young birds of this sort are thought to be much more hardy than the others, and fatten more easily.

Jenny and the Birds.



Jenny. I have sometimes thought that the peacock might be a relation of your's.

Turkey. So he is,—a kind of cousin; though we came from opposite sides of the globe. The wild peacock is to India what the wild turkey is to America; and, indeed, the first white people who visited this country called the turkeys peacocks. They abound in India, where they may be seen by hundreds at a time, strutting about, or throwing their magnificent trains from the branches of the trees. It is, however, an error to say that the peacock spreads his tail. The superb plumes which he is so fond of displaying grow from his back, and are supported in an upright position by the real tail, which consists of a circle of stiff, dark-brown feathers.

Jenny. They are beautiful birds; but, after all, I do not care much about them. They do not seem to have much sense or to be very amiable; and their voices are certainly any thing but pleasant.

Turkey. True: they are terrible squallers at all times, and are always especially noisy before a rain. As you say, they are not very

amiable, and they often kill young chickens by pecking their heads with their hard, sharp bills. Peacocks used to be considered excellent eating, and some people like them now-a-days; but they are not sufficiently common to be tasted very often. The wild peacocks of India have a curious habit with regard to the tiger. No sooner does a peacock discover one of these animals than he sounds the alarm, and the whole covey begin to strut around the monster with bristling wings and expanded tail, often following him to a considerable distance. The native sportsmen take advantage of this habit, and, by placing themselves behind a cloth screen, painted black and yellow to imitate the tiger, they succeed in procuring as many of these birds as they want.

Jenny. And does the Guinea-fowl come from India too?

Turkey. No: he is an African bird, as his name indicates,—though I understand that he thrives very well in India. But all our common barn-door fowls come from India, and may be seen running wild in the jungles and forests of that country. The great awkward Shanghai

comes from China, (where he had much better have stayed, in my opinion;) and there are several very handsome broods inhabiting the different islands of the Indian Archipelago. Such is the black-a-moor, or negro cock, which has the outer surface of the bones black, and the comb, wattles and skin of a dull purple colour; the Friesland cock, whose feathers stand almost at right angles with his body and appear to grow the wrong way; the spunky little bantams, both smooth and rough legged, which come from the island of Java; and many others,—most of them useful, many of them pretty, and others very much the reverse. Then there are the beautiful gold and silver pheasants, which you may have seen in menageries and which are much kept as pets in England.

Jenny. I do not think hens are very sensible birds.

Turkey. In general they are silly enough,—though there is now and then an exception, like your brother's little bantam cock, that had so many accomplishments. The old yellow hen, too, which brings up the ducklings,

showed that she at least had wit enough to learn by experience. The first brood of ducklings caused her a great deal of trouble by taking to the water, and it seemed for the first two or three times as though she would go crazy, as people say, till she had them out again. But after a little time she seemed to make up her mind that there was something in the nature of ducks different from that of chickens; and ever since she has shown neither annoyance nor alarm, but waits quietly on the bank of the brook till they have finished their sport.

Jenny. There is something about a quail which always puts me in mind of a hen.

Turkey. That is very natural. The quail and the different species of grouse belong to the same great natural family as the domestic fowl.

Jenny. Quails used to be very common in this part of the country; but they have greatly diminished of late years. My mother told me that when she first came here to live they used to run about the roads and fields like chickens; and even I remember when a great

many used to be brought to the house for sale. Now one hardly ever sees them.

Turkey. They have followed in the track of the wild turkeys and all the other game. As long as they were abundant, they were destroyed without mercy, even at the most improper times for shooting them.

Jenny. What does the quail eat?

Turkey. Insects of all sorts,—especially grasshoppers and ants,—and every description of berries and grain. They are as fond as hens are of a variety of food. They are thought to be in the best condition for eating about the end of summer and in the fall.

Jenny. Do quails pair?

Turkey. Yes; and they are remarkably constant in their attachments, and very kind and attentive to their little ones. The mother makes a very pretty round and curved nest, shaped something like an oven, in some quiet and sheltered situation,—perhaps in the long grass, where I have heard of their having their heads cut off by the seythe of the mower. In this retreat she lays from ten to eighteen pure-white eggs, upon which she sits for about

four weeks,—the male occasionally relieving her. The young ones are covered with stiff down, and are able to move about the moment they are hatched,—sometimes before the shell is fairly off their heads. In the course of a fortnight they are able to fly. The mother broods them much as a hen broods her chickens, leads them in search of food, and teaches them how to escape if pursued by an enemy. The moment danger is perceived, the father and mother begin to flutter in the path as if wounded, while the young ones skulk among the grass and herbage, where they lie close and still till the danger is over,—their dusky mixed colours rendering them almost invisible even when one is close upon them. When the trouble is passed by, a cautious call from the parents brings them together again.

Jenny. I had no idea that they were such affectionate birds. I have heard people say to children who were disputing, “You are as quarrelsome as quails in a cage.”

Turkey. In the breeding-season, indeed, the males have terrible battles among themselves;

but at other times they are fond of each others' society, and often associate in large flocks. They have a rather curious way of betaking themselves to rest. They squat on the ground in a circle, with their tails turned towards the centre, and then gradually back inward till they are close together. In this way they prepare themselves in case of any sudden alarm to start all at once and in different directions.

Jenny. Do quails migrate?

Turkey. No: they remain all winter, generally taking shelter from the most inclement weather under the covert of bushes and briars, where they nestle close together for warmth and companionship. They seem to mind the snow very little,—though it now and then happens that a covey of quails is buried under the falling drifts. In such a case, when the snow melts in the spring, the quails are found sitting in their favourite position, all cold and dead.

Jenny. I wish the poor little creatures would come into the barn-yard. I am sure they would be quite welcome to a shelter and to plenty of food.

Turkey. In new countries they not unfrequently do so; but, as they become familiar with the ways of man, they perhaps find out what price he puts upon his protection. You would not be very likely to take up your board and lodging with any one who you were pretty sure would kill and eat you as soon as you were fat enough. People have sometimes raised them quite successfully by putting their eggs under a hen. Biddy hatches them out and brings them up with her usual care, and they follow her about for some time as tamely as chickens; but they no sooner reach the next spring, and hear the family-call sounding from the fields, than—whirr!—off goes Bob White, and that is the last that is seen of him. Sometimes the hen will lay her eggs in the nest of a quail, who makes no objection to hatching the strange eggs and bringing up the chickens, teaching them all the arts and stratagems of young quails. I once heard a story of two quails which were hatched by a hen, and which, after their foster-mother had left them to their own resources, attached themselves to the cows.

They regularly followed their four-footed friends home from the pasture at night and returned with them in the morning; and when the cows were housed for the winter the quails took up their abode in the same stable. There they lived, in the greatest contentment, through all the cold weather; but as soon as spring came they resumed their wild habits and flew away to join their natural companions.

Jenny. I think all that sort of birds are very hard to tame. One year, when I was quite a little girl, father bought twenty or thirty partridges, and put them into a large coop, intending to have them killed as they were wanted; but we children began to feed them, and finally became so much attached to them that he gave them to us for pets. They were as wild as hawks at first; but by degrees they seemed to become reconciled to their situation, and grew very tame, so that they would eat out of our hands. When spring came; we let them go, hoping that they would stay about the garden and orchard. They seemed hardly to know what to do with themselves at first; but in a very little time they found the use

of their wings and legs, and we never saw any of them afterwards. It seemed rather ungrateful in the little things, after we had taken such good care of them all through the cold weather.

Turkey. Ah, my dear, the instinct of liberty is stronger than any other feeling, whether in bird, beast or man. I suppose the partridges you speak of were ruffed grouse, as they are generally called by that name about here.

Jenny. They were pretty, brown birds, larger than quails, with a kind of ruff around their necks; and their tails were marked with a broad band of white. Father showed me one of the same kind of birds in the woods the other day. He was standing, with a very haughty air, upon a hollow log; and while we were watching him he began to beat his wings against his body. It made a very curious noise, something like distant thunder. My father called it drumming.

Turkey. Yes: that describes the ruffed grouse. He is sometimes called the pheasant and sometimes the partridge; but neither name exactly belongs to him. Like the quails,

they were formerly abundant in this country; and a good many may even now be found in secluded places. The partridges do not mate like the quail, but live more like the common barn-door fowls. They have tremendous battles in the spring, when they are drawn together by each others' drumming, and seem to consider it a point of honour never to give up as long as they are able to stand. At this time of year the ladies do not trouble themselves at all about these duels; but, should their lords and masters get to quarrelling in the fall, they invariably interfere and make peace.

Jenny. And what about their nests? Do they build on the ground, like the quails?

Turkey. Yes: but they do not take nearly so much pains about it,—the female merely scraping together a few withered leaves, among which she lays from ten to fifteen eggs of a dull, yellowish colour. The young partridges are even more active than their cousins the quails,—running about as soon as hatched, and being able to use their wings in the course of a few days. The hen partridge is fully as

careful a mother as the quail, employs the same artifices to guard her young from danger, and when she has but one she will take it in her mouth and fly away with it. Of course she cannot adopt this plan when she has a large brood; and then, like the quail, she teaches them to conceal themselves, while she seeks to divert attention from their retreat by fluttering about as if lame or wounded. When she finally flies up, it is with a loud, whirring noise. It is curious that they never make this whirring except when they are alarmed, rising at other times as quietly as any other bird. Partridges are generally considered best for food in the fall and winter, and many States have laws against shooting them at any other time; notwithstanding which, many are killed in the breeding-season, when their flesh is worth very little, and when the loss of a hen insures the destruction of her eggs or the starvation of her little brood. If surprised in the winter, they will often dive into the deep snow, and, coming out at a considerable distance, again take wing. They show at times a good deal of courage and

sense; while at other times they will act like perfect simpletons, sitting among the branches of a tree and gazing stupidly down at a dog barking below, till they fall an easy prey to the sportsman. But there is another still more curious species of grouse, which, though seldom or never seen wild in this part of the country, is common enough at the West: I mean the pinnated grouse, or prairie-hen, as it is more commonly called.

Jenny. I have seen them. My cousin sent us some last winter. They were pretty birds, and very nice eating.

Turkey. You can form no idea of their appearance by seeing them after they have been dead some days. In their wild state they are very handsome,—especially the males, being beautifully banded and mottled with different shades of brown. But what particularly distinguishes these beaux is the curious appendage to each side of the neck. This is of a bright orange colour, and when empty resembles a small shrunk bladder; but when they are filled with air—an operation which the bird can perform at pleasure—they look

like middle-sized oranges, and give the wearer a very comical appearance.

Jenny. What is the use of them?

Turkey. They are his musical instruments. When he wishes to call his lady-love or to defy a rival, he distends these pouches with air, and, laying his bill close to the ground, he begins a low "toot," sounding somewhat like the notes of a muffled drum. When the bags are empty, he raises his head and looks proudly around him,—after which he fills his musical pouches and begins again. Like the quail and the ruffed grouse, they are obstinate fighters, and seem to find real pleasure in the exercise. The female lays from ten to fifteen eggs, and brings them up in the same manner as the quail,—though without receiving any assistance from the father of the family, who never troubles himself at all about his children. In the fall and winter they associate in large flocks; and then hundreds of them are killed. They are esteemed a very great dainty; and many are sent as far as New York and Boston, where they are said

to be sometimes sold for as much as five or six dollars a pair.

Jenny. What a price to give for two little birds—just for one meal! Why, five dollars will buy quite a nice little Sunday-school library,—to say nothing about other things. When my uncle was in the city the other day, he gave Mrs. N—— five dollars to buy cotton, cloth and calico for her sewing-school; and she said it would keep the little girls in work for some time. I do not think it can be right to spend money in that way.

Turkey. It seems very silly; but people who are possessed with the love of eating do not mind giving extravagant prices for things that suit their taste. If persons were contented with simple, healthy and sufficient food, they might save a great deal both in time and comfort, as well as in money. Why, even the greedy pigs know when they have had enough.

Jenny. The ducks do not, however. The other day, when Cousin Fred was here, he went to work digging up earth-worms for the young ducklings, and—would you believe

it?—the little creatures ate so many that three of them actually tumbled down and died. Cousin Fred felt very badly about it; but, of course, he was not to blame.

Turkey. All birds are not like ducks, I am thankful to say. Well, Miss Jenny, we have had quite a long talk about matters and things, and I have been so much interested in our conversation that I have never once thought of the red shawl. But, if I might presume to ask a favour, I would request you to keep it out of sight as much as possible; for it really does annoy me very much. I don't pretend to be above the infirmities of turkey nature, and I would rather see a fox any day than a piece of red cloth.

Jenny. I will try to remember your antipathies; for I would not needlessly offend even a bird.

As an article of food, turkeys are much esteemed; and the raising and fattening of them for market forms a very important source of profit. In England, as the Christmas season approaches, hundreds of turkeys

are driven up to town, especially from the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, being kept in order by means of a red rag tied to a long stick. One writer tells us that upon one single Saturday night and Sunday morning more than seventeen hundred turkeys were sent by coach to London from the single town of Norfolk alone; and since the many lines of railroad afford increased facilities for transportation, the traffic is greatly extended. Turkey poult, or young turkeys fattened by cramming, are much esteemed in England; but I have never seen them in market here.

Mr. Broderip discusses the date of the turkey's introduction into Europe, and fixes it at or about the year 1530. Thus, they preceded by more than fifty years the appearance of the potato, which was brought over by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1586. Turkeys must have increased rapidly, as they were sold in 1553 for only four shillings each, and in 1575 they were common Christmas fare at all farmers' tables. They were a standard article of diet with the early settlers in North America. Lawson, the traveller and sur-

veyor, who explored Virginia in the year 1700, complains more than once of being “cloyed with turkeys”—a thing that might the more readily happen as the travellers took no salt with them. Much as we are accustomed to value game, it often comes to be lightly esteemed in places where it abounds. The labourers and servants in the city of Boston used formerly to make it a condition with their employers that they should not be obliged to eat heath-hens (prairie-hens, or pin-nated grouse) more than a few times in each week. Captain Basil Hall tells of an old woman whom he met in his travels,—I think upon the Mississippi River,—who complained to him bitterly of the miseries and privations of a squatter’s life, ending with the pathetic declaration that for more than half a year she had not tasted *meat*. This seemed a large story even to Captain Hall; and he inquired, in some surprise, if her husband and son could not hunt, as game was most abundant in the neighbourhood. Upon a further examination, the old lady admitted that they had abundance of venison, bear’s meat and turkeys,—not to

mention squirrels, wild-fowl, &c., but asked, with great contempt, “You don’t call that meat, do you? I haven’t tasted a bit of salt pork these six months !”

Peacocks were early introduced into Europe from India. The word occurs in the Bible, as descriptive of one of the articles of the Indian trade carried on by Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre. See 1 Kings x. 22:— “For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.” These two remarkable and hitherto unknown animals would be likely to attract the attention of the Jewish mariners, and were, no doubt, very acceptable to their royal master, who seems to have had a great fondness for natural history in all its branches. In Job xxxix. 13 we have an allusion to the same bird:— “Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks?” but Gesenius and Robinson make the word translated “peacocks” mean ostriches. After the time of Solomon, we hear no more of peacocks till the invasion of India by

Alexander, whose soldiers were so charmed by these beautiful and curious birds that they severely punished any person who killed one.

In later times, in Europe, the peacock was considered a great delicacy, and was served up at the tables of the rich and great in grand style. The bird was skinned with great care, and the body dressed with abundance of sweet herbs, spices and wine. It was then clothed anew with its plumage, and in this state formed a magnificent addition to the feast. The knights were accustomed to take their solemn vows of adventure before "the ladies and the peacock."

Our domestic fowls were evidently brought from the East,—though at some very distant period. They are still to be found, in their native state, in the jungle-districts of India, where they are much esteemed as an article of food, from their fine game-flavour. The good qualities of the cock are too well known to need description. Except in the matter of having more wives than one, he is quite a model of devotion and chivalry. No sooner does he find a delicious morsel than all the hens

near are called to partake; and he is always ready to do battle in defence of his family. His courage and pugnacity are frequently taken advantage of by bipeds pretending to be more elevated in the scale of creation than himself; and in many countries cock-fights are a favourite diversion even with what are called the upper classes. In many places in the West Indies, Mexico and South America, the church and the cock-pit are near neighbours, and the people go from the mass to the cock-fight much as a matter of course. I believe this cruel sport is not patronized in our country, save by people of the lowest grade.

The crowing of the cock was anciently supposed to frighten away spirits of all sorts. Whatever liberties these unearthly visitors were allowed to take in the early part of the night, it was said they all vanished into their own domains at cock-crowing. At Christmas-tide the cock was said to crow all night long. During that season, therefore, no goblin dared walk abroad, and the wayfarer might pursue his darkening path in safety,—so far, at least,

as the goblins were concerned. Increasing knowledge has banished most of these superstitious fancies; but there are still some of them remaining. Thus, the cock's crowing at evening is believed by many to be a sign of rain, according to the old proverb,—

“If the cock goes crowing to bed
He'll surely rise with a watery head.”

It is curious that, while the crowing of a cock is welcome to every ear, the crowing of a hen is considered by many as a sure presage of coming misfortune. It is often so to herself. Many a luckless biddy has come to an untimely end at the hands of her owner, black or white, because she has presumed to raise her voice in feeble imitation of the clear notes of her lord.

Fatted fowls were among the dishes prepared for the table of King Solomon day by day; but whether they were of the common barn-door species cannot, perhaps, be ascertained with certainty. They were evidently common at Jerusalem in our Saviour's day, as *cock-crowing* is mentioned as a recognised

period of time:—"at evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning." It was the second crowing of the cock which brought back to the mind of Peter the mournful and affectionate warning of his suffering Lord:—"This day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

CHAPTER IX.

GOOSY GANDER AND HIS FRIENDS.



HERE is one thing I should like to know, Miss Jenny.

Jenny. Well, pray, what is it?

Gander. Why, most people always say, "As silly as a goose." Why are geese any more silly than any other birds?

Jenny. I am sure I do not know, unless it is because nature made them so.

Gander. But nature didn't! A goose appears to me to be quite as sensible as bipeds in general. I am sure we have much more intellect than those silly, gadding hens,—though, to be sure, that might be, without our setting ourselves up for patterns in that respect; for

Jenny and the Birds.



I don't believe any living creature has less brains than a hen. But, really, geese know a good deal,—as you will find out if you observe them closely.

Jenny. I am glad to learn it; for I have always had a liking for geese. They look so pretty sailing in the water, especially when they have a little troop of downy green-goslings about them.

Gander. And, though I say it myself, what admirable care the gander takes of his young family! How majestically he leads the way into the water and swims round and round the little flock! How carefully he watches that no danger may come near them! And how valiantly he flies to their defence if an enemy approaches! Indeed, it was this very vigilance upon the part of geese that gained them the highest honours which have ever been paid to our family.

Jenny. How was that?

Gander. Why, you must know that a great many years ago there was a city in Italy called Rome, which was always at war with its neighbours, near and far; and finally it so

happened that they got into a quarrel with the Gauls. This people made war upon them, and so far gained the advantage that they pillaged and burned the city, killing or taking captive all the inhabitants remaining in it. The citadel, or fortress, being garrisoned with a band of brave and resolute young men, resisted all their attacks for a long time. At last, however, the Gauls discovered an easy ascent to the top of the rock upon which the citadel was built; and, taking advantage of a clear moonlight night, they climbed up with such care and silence that even the very dogs were not awakened. But there were sentinels in the castle more watchful than dogs. A flock of geese had been spared, even in the great scarcity of provisions, on account of their being sacred to Juno, one of the deities of the Romans. These birds heard the slight sounds made by the ascent of the stealthy Gauls, and immediately set up such a cackling, screaming and flapping of wings as to awaken a man named Marcus Manlius. This person, who possessed great firmness and presence of mind, discovered at

once what was going on; and, seizing his arms, he ran to the rescue, at the same time calling to his companions that the enemy was upon them. The moment he reached the spot he struck with his shield the foremost of the Gauls, who had already gained a foothold upon the summit of the rock, and hurled him down upon his companions, who were climbing the steep ascent. These fell in their turn upon others; and thus many were slain, and the whole party thrown into the greatest confusion. Not very long after this the Gauls were defeated and entirely destroyed by the Roman army, and the Capitol delivered. After this, geese were held in great esteem in Rome, and a flock was always maintained in the Capitol at the public expense.

Jenny. That is a very pretty story, and all the better for being true; but—

Gander. Well, but what?

Jenny. I have often heard geese scream upon moonlight nights when there were no Gauls, nor other enemies, near them.

Gander. Now, Miss Jenny, it is hardly fair to try to detract from our family honours in

that way. If there are no Gauls, there may be other people; and it is certainly true that geese are very wary creatures, and always scream when they are disturbed in the night, whether it be moonlight or not.

Jenny. I assure you, Gander, I am quite willing to allow to the geese the credit of having saved Rome; and I am glad that they received due honour for it. Are there any more such stories about your family?

Gander. I am not aware that they have figured in history at any other time; but there are plenty of stories about them and their kindred. If you please, I can tell you all about the wild geese, and how they go to Labrador to make their nests in the summer-time; for my mother was a wild goose, and she has described the whole matter to me many a time.

Jenny. I should like very much to hear it. So your mother was a wild goose?

Gander. Yes: that is the reason why I am so strong and hardy. My mother told me that, when she first opened her eyes after getting her head out of the shell, she found

herself in a nest made of withered leaves carelessly scraped together under a bush, in company with seven other goslings, all, like herself, just out of the shell. Her mother was assisting her to dry and clean herself, while her father stood sentry by the side of the nest, watching that no raccoon or mink might harm his precious family. As soon as they were able to stand on their feet, their father and mother, after a short consultation, led the way out of the thicket and directed their course towards a beautiful bay, which lay at a short distance, with its blue water gently rippling in the sunshine. The moment my mother beheld this water, she knew that she could swim, and felt all impatience to try her powers. The old birds seemed pleased with their children's eagerness, and, quickening their pace, they were soon all floating together on the clear waves,—while hundreds of other geese, as well as swans, loons and wild ducks of all sorts, floated, swam and dived round about them. My mother was delighted with the coolness of the water, the ease of her movements and the beautiful ap-

pearance of the sky and the banks; but, while she was amusing herself with spattering the clear drops over herself and her companions, a cry from her parents alarmed her, and, looking up, she beheld an enormous bird floating in the air at a great height above them. It was an eagle. She had time for only a glance before, obeying the whispered directions of her mother, she dived quietly, and was soon concealed with only the tip of her little bill above water. In this manner the whole party made their way towards the shore, where they were soon hidden among the reeds; and the eagle sailed away with loud screams of disappointment and vexation. This scene was repeated many times during their stay in Labrador. I am sorry to be obliged to add that one of my uncles,—a silly, conceited young gosling—thought he knew quite as much of such matters as his parents, and one day, neglecting to dive at the very moment he was told to do so, he was seized and devoured by a jager-gull (a very strong and fierce bird, almost as terrible as an eagle) before the very eyes of

his agonized parents, who could do nothing to help him.

Jenny. Poor little gosling! What a pity that he was so self-willed!

Gander. Yes: my mother used often to remind us of the fate of our uncle when we showed any signs of obstinacy and conceit. With this sad exception, the summer passed delightfully. You know that in those high northern latitudes the nights at that season are very short; the sun does not set till nearly midnight, and goes such a little way below the horizon that it is hardly dark at all. The air is warm and pleasant, the sky serene, and thousands of flowers and insects come out to enjoy the short summer. There is abundance of food to be found in every creek, bay and river; and, above all, there are no men to molest. The only enemies to be feared are the minks and raccoons on the land, and the eagles and other birds of prey on the water; and from these the wild fowl know pretty well how to defend themselves. This first summer was passed by the young birds in a perpetual round of feasting and merri-

ment; and many of them grew so fat before they were able to fly that they could hardly move about at all.

But all the pleasant things of earth come to an end sooner or later. Even by the middle of August the nights began to be cold, and there was a sharp, frosty feeling in the air, which made the older birds look rather anxious and caused them to hold many consultations among themselves. By this time all the goslings were pretty well feathered, and their parents began to exercise their yet-untried wings in longer and longer flights, till they, who when they first began could hardly support their own weight in the air, were able to pass over a great distance with ease. In September all the water-fowl were on the alert, pluming and dressing themselves and talking over their plans for the coming winter. My mother, who had observed every thing, at last asked what all this bustle meant.

Upon this, my grandfather and grandmother assembled all their family under a clump of reeds, and my grandmother thus addressed them:—

“In a few days, my children, the warm weather and the serene skies which you have enjoyed ever since you were born will disappear, and be replaced by heavy fogs, driving clouds and blinding snow-storms, and this now beautiful country will become a cold and cheerless desert. The water will first be filled with floating ice, and then frozen up entirely, and all our sources of supply will be cut off. It will therefore become necessary for us to follow the example of wild geese in all ages, and provide for our comfort and safety by emigrating to some southern country, where we shall enjoy the same genial climate with which we have hitherto been favoured here.”

“At hearing these words,” continued my mother, “we all set up a joyful cackle; for, like other young folks, we were fond of variety, and enjoyed the idea of travelling above all things; but our mother soon hushed our transports.

“‘Giddy little creatures!’ said she, ‘listen to me, and pay attention to what I shall tell you; for your lives depend upon it. In the

course of a few days, we, with our connections and relatives who have spent the summer in this happy retreat, shall gather ourselves together and take our way southward. The expedition will be commanded by your uncle, Brownlegs, who is by far the oldest gander among us, and has already made the journey many times. To his guidance we shall commit ourselves; and we hope that he will bring us safely through all the trials and dangers of the way,—trials and dangers of which you, my dear goslings, have not the least idea. What I wish to impress upon your tender minds is this: that you must not in any case trust to your own resources or judgment, but obey implicitly the commands of your venerable uncle. I shall not fatigue you at this time with informing you of all the dangers of the way, but shall content myself with pointing them out as we go along; and I trust that you will be warned by the sad fate of your poor dear little brother, and insure your safety by perfect and instant obedience,—in which case I have little doubt that we shall

all carriye happily at the place of our destination.'

"We had been a little cast down by the first part of our parent's speech," my mother went on to say; "but the last sentence cheered us up again. We promised to be as good and obedient as we knew how, and as soon as we were dismissed we ran eagerly to seek out some of the last year's geese, that we might gain from them a little information as to our course. But they were all busy with their own families; and we goslings had no other resource than to huddle together in the creeks and little inlets and compare notes upon the information we had received from our respective parents. We found that our playmates knew little more of the matter than we did. True, one of them had heard something about a man and a gun; but, as none of us had ever seen either a man or a gun, we were not much the wiser for that. We waited with impatience for the signal to set out on our journey, and were perfectly delighted—poor, short-sighted goslings that we were!—when our mother informed us, on our return home from an

excursion one night, that we were to set out early in the morning. We could hardly sleep for thinking of the pleasure before us on the morrow. By the first peep of daylight we were all ready; and at the signal 'hank! hank!' of my uncle, the leader, the whole flock rose into the air, and, taking the form of a wedge, thus,



we shaped our course directly southward. I remember well how I turned to look back as the dear familiar bay faded into the dim distance, saying to myself, 'How many wonderful and beautiful things I shall have seen before I return to these shores to raise a family of my own!' I little thought then that I was never to see them again.

"We flew rapidly southward, without pausing a moment, either to rest or eat, till I, who had never been used to such long fasts, began

to find myself both tired and hungry, and made the discovery that travelling was not all pleasure. We had come a long way, (for wild geese fly very fast,) and were now passing over a level but well-watered country, where I saw many pleasant-looking streams and reed-beds, which hunger and fatigue rendered doubly attractive to my eyes. It was growing late, we had already passed many fine feeding-grounds, and still there was no appearance of any intention to stop for the night. My youngest sister was growing as tired as myself, and presently came to my side.

“‘Gray-wing,’ said she, ‘how long are we to be kept flying at this rate without rest or food?’

“‘I am sure I don’t know,’ I replied, pettishly enough: ‘I think if my uncle does not give the signal to halt pretty soon, I, for one, shall halt without a signal. I am almost starved, and ready to drop with fatigue besides; and, really, I do think he might have a little consideration for us young ones, who have never travelled before.’

“As I spoke, we both looked down, and beheld beneath us a small, reedy pond, filled by a clear but somewhat sluggish stream, and without a sign of inhabitant of any sort,—unless it might be a pile of brush and reeds at one end about as big as a musk-rat’s nest. My sister and I looked at each other. We had dropped quite into the rear of the flock, that we might talk without being overheard.

“‘That looks like a nice place,’ said my sister. ‘Suppose we stop there and rest?’

“‘I don’t know about it,’ replied I. ‘What is that queer green thing at the end?’

“‘Oh, that is only a musk-rat’s nest, or some such thing,’ she replied.

“At that moment my uncle sounded his ‘hank! hank!’ and the whole flock rose high into the air and increased their speed.

“‘There we go,’ said my sister,—‘higher and faster than ever. They may go on in that way all night if they choose; but *I* won’t. Come, gray-wing, let us turn back and rest by that pond. We can easily follow on after the others to-morrow.’

“‘Suppose we lose our way,’ said I.

“‘We sha’n’t,’ she replied. ‘It is only to fly directly southward, and we cannot miss it.’

“I am ashamed to confess it,” said my mother, “but I yielded to the suggestions of my sister and of my own appetite; and, leaving the flock, we descended silently and swiftly towards the lake. We had not yet reached it, however, when we heard the flapping of wings close behind us, and, looking round, we beheld my dear father, who had seen our desertion and come in pursuit of us.

“‘Wicked and perverse goslings,’ said he, sternly, ‘you are going to certain destruction. Return quickly, before it is too late.’

“I was terrified by his manner, and sulkily prepared to obey; but my sister said, pertly,—

“‘I am sure I don’t see any danger; and I don’t want to fly all night with nothing to eat.’

“My father had opened his bill to reply, when a flash of fire, followed by a loud report, issued from what we had taken for a muskrat’s nest, and my sister fell whirling and tumbling through the air, shot dead—while

my poor dear father followed her, vainly trying to support himself upon one unbroken wing, while the other hung useless by his side. Even in the moment of his own fate he did not forget me, but with almost his dying breath he called on me to hasten after the flock, now almost out of sight. Terror strengthened my wings, and I was among them before I had reflected how I was to meet my poor mother and my brothers and sisters, upon whom my disobedience had brought such a dreadful calamity. Wicked as I was, I was spared the punishment of being the first to tell the news. A neighbour had already carried the sad story; and when I joined her, I found she knew it all. She received me without a word of reproach, and treated me as tenderly as usual; but all the other geese looked upon me with contempt and abhorrence, and for a while I was so miserable that I almost wished that the Indian—for such it was—had shot me as well as my father and sister.

“After a while, and when it was quite dark, my uncle gave the signal to alight, which we

all obeyed with joy. We passed the night in a lonely and secluded bay on the borders of a small lake, somewhat like that where my father and sister had met their death, and where we found abundance of food. My mother refused to eat any thing, and passed the whole night in mourning for her husband; but we younger ones, and I, who was the guilty cause of all the trouble, made a hearty meal, —not that I was unfeeling, but that I was very hungry.

“We continued our flight for several days longer, without any other mishap,” continued my mother, “and arrived at last upon the rich, swampy plains of the Opelousas, in Louisiana, where we proposed to spend the winter. Though we had been very fat when we started from home, our long and rapid journey had so exhausted us that we had hardly strength to support our wasted bodies, and were very glad to spend the first few days after our arrival chiefly in eating and sleeping. The climate was warm and delightful, the ponds and bayous were filled with abundance of our favourite food, and, better than all, our enemy

—man—seldom molested us. We saw nothing of him, except that now and then one of the herdsmen came to look after the cattle which roam over those great pastures; and though one or two of our number lost their lives, yet, on the whole, we were almost entirely undisturbed. Here I met with hundreds of birds which were new to me. Long-legged, rosy and scarlet flamingoes, some of them a yard and a half high, waded about the salt inlets and marshes. In the woods, beautiful scarlet and white ibises stirred up the mud of the shallow pools, and when the fish rose to the top of the water for air, they killed them with a single stroke of their strong, sword-like beak, destroying in this manner ten times more fish than they could eat. It is a little curious, by the way, that the fish-hawk, who is so very particular about killing his own game and will not even descend to pick up the fish that he has himself dropped, makes an exception in favour of the ibis, and gladly eats what that bird kills. The great blue and white herons, each almost as tall as a tall man, stood watching on the

shores, or stalked solemnly about, and, whenever they met, fought out their family feuds. Long-necked snake-birds, or darters, perched on the trees over the water, jerking their curious, snake-like heads and necks about in every direction, now and then dropping plump down into the water, where they dived and swam about, sometimes with only the very point of the bill above the surface. But I should tire you out if I were to tell you of only half the curious birds and animals whose acquaintance I made in Louisiana.

“In the midst of these scenes, and consoled by the affectionate attentions of myself and my surviving brothers and sisters, and the sympathy of all our friends and relations, my mother gradually recovered her health and spirits; and in the spring she took another mate,—a gander of her own age, who had lost his wife by the same contrivance which had cost me my father. I had also chosen a mate; and very early in the spring we set out for the North, where I expected to spend a happy summer in the same locality in which I was hatched.

“But it was not to be. Twice, after we had almost come in sight of our destination, the weather turned suddenly cold; and we were obliged to retrace our flight. On one of these occasions we were enveloped in a blinding snow-storm. Separated from my faithful mate, and involved almost in total darkness, my feathers drenched and my wings stiffened with cold, I could no longer support myself in the air. I called loudly to my companions, and was answered by a “hank” near at hand. Pleased with the thought of meeting one of my own race, I descended at once to the spot whence the sound proceeded; but what was my horror when I suddenly found myself seized and discovered that I was a helpless prisoner in the hands of my greatest enemy! He had heard my call for help, and had answered it with such perfect mimicry that I had taken him for a friend. Remembering, as I did, the fate of my father and sister, I expected nothing but instant death; but in this, too, I was disappointed. He did me no harm beyond cutting off the first joint of my wing; and, carrying me home, he turned me into the pen

with his tame geese. At first I was inconsolable, and struggled desperately for my liberty; but in vain: my maimed wing refused to raise me from the earth, and I had the mortification of seeing flock after flock of my companions pass over my head on their way to that dear Northern home which I was never to see again.

“By degrees I became calmer, and began to make the acquaintance of my new companions, who treated me with great respect; and by the next spring I had become so accustomed to my circumstances as to accept the addresses of your father, with whom I lived long and happily, and reared many families of goslings, to whom I hope their mother’s story will teach the advantages of docility and humility and the punishment which is sure to overtake disobedience and self-conceit.”

Such, Miss Jenny, was my dear mother’s story. She was quite an old goose when I knew her, and very fat and contented, except in the spring and fall, when she felt an overpowering desire to join her own species as they floated through the air on their long journeys.

So strongly was she influenced by this feeling that she once set out to make the journey on foot; but, luckily for herself, she was found by a neighbour in a field about two miles north of here, and restored to her home.

Jenny. What an interesting story! and how much pleasure you must have taken in hearing your mother tell it! There is nothing that Fanny and I enjoy so much as hearing our father and mother tell us of the things that they used to do when they were children. I think the account of her father's death ought to be a warning to us not to be determined upon having our own way.

Gander. I always put my goslings in mind of it when I see in them any tokens of self-conceit and obstinacy. In general, I am happy to say that they are quite modest and very good and obedient. You never heard of a gosling killing itself with eating, like those greedy young ducklings. The ducks are my cousins, it is true; but I cannot help feeling ashamed of them, sometimes, when I see how they stuff themselves till they are just

ready to expire. Then, too, they are such dirty creatures !

Jenny. There I cannot agree with you. To be sure, the ducks are always dabbling in mud, which, I suppose, is because they find their food there; but you never see a duck with a speck of dirt upon herself, and her plumage is smoother and closer than that of any other bird.

Duck. Thank you, Miss Jenny, for saying a good word for an old friend. I must say, gander, I think you might be better employed than in slandering your own relations behind their backs. I am sure we have never eaten at your expense: so I cannot see what reason you have for troubling yourself about my appetite or that of my ducklings.

Gander. Listeners never hear any good of themselves.

Jenny. Hush ! hush ! Don't quarrel.

Duck. I am not going to quarrel; but I think it rather hard that I cannot defend myself when a person attacks me. However, I have done. What have you been talking about all this time ?

Gander. I have been telling Miss Jenny the story of my dear mother's life and early adventures. Now, if you please, you may take your turn in entertaining her, while I go and look after my goslings a little.

Duck. Well, Miss Jenny, I suppose you have heard the history of the whole goose tribe from first to last. He is so proud of his family that he is always talking about his dear mother, just to let people know that she was a Canada goose. Now, I never think of boasting of my descent,—though my father was a mandarin drake, brought from China by a sea-captain, who presented him to your father. But there is the difference. Some people stand upon their own merits, and others upon those of their ancestors. I am one of the first; and I never think of boasting of my grandfather,—though I am sure it is much more of a distinction to be the grand-daughter of an imported mandarin drake than to be the son of a Canada goose.

Jenny. I don't see much to choose, I must say. But did your grandfather really come from China?

Duck. Certainly; and my grandmother, too.

Jenny. How did that happen?

Duck. Why, the sea-captain of whom I spoke carried over to China a load of a kind of root called ginseng, of which the Chinese are very fond, considering it a very valuable medicine. This root used to grow quite plentifully in this part of the country,—where, indeed, it may still be found by those who care to look for it,—and the captain employed your father to gather it and prepare it for market. In return, besides his share of the profits of the voyage, the sea-captain brought your father many curiosities, and among them this pair of mandarin drakes, which were given to him by a friend at Hong-Kong. The birds thrived very well under their change of climate and circumstances, and, in due time, raised many broods of ducklings as handsome as themselves. These, mingling with the common ducks, produced a mixed breed,—of which I am one.

Jenny. I remember the old mandarin drake; but I thought the name had been given him

because he was so proud and tyrannical. I have often noticed that our ducks are much handsomer than those of our neighbours.

Duck. Yes: your father sets a great value upon his breed of ducks. But then we ought not to be proud of our beauty. Mere beauty of feathers is of little account; and many of the wild ducks are as handsome as ourselves. Did you ever see the wood-duck,—or summer-duck, as some people call it?

Jenny. Not that I know of. Why are they called wood-ducks?

Duck. Because they live in the woods, where they build their nests in the hollows of trees at some distance from the ground,—sometimes in a place where a branch has been broken off, often in the deserted hole of a squirrel or woodpecker. It seems rather a strange taste for a bird, does it not?

Jenny. It does, certainly. I should think, too, that it would be rather inconvenient,—as all little ducks want to get into the water the moment that they are hatched.

Duck. They get over that disadvantage very easily. If, as it often happens, the hole

that they have chosen is directly over the water, the little things spread their tiny wings and drop without danger or difficulty into their favourite element. Should the nest be at some distance from the water, the mother often takes her nestlings one by one in her bill, and transports them in that way; but if she has no mind to take so much trouble, or the distance is inconveniently great, she drops them on the soft ground at the foot of the tree and then leads them to the nearest shore. They can walk upon land better than most ducks. You may perhaps have noticed that none of our family are very swift-footed.

Jenny. Nor swift-winged, I should think.

Duck. There you make a great mistake. Many of the wild ducks are as strong on the wing as any wild goose,—as you must see when you consider that a great many species perform long migrations, breeding at the far North and returning to the Mississippi to pass the winter.

Jenny. I suppose, then, that there are a great many species of wild ducks.

Duck. Oh, yes,—more than I can tell you. There is the canvas-back duck, which is found in the waters of the Chesapeake, and which is greatly valued on account of its fine flavour; the blue and green ringed teal; the widgeon; the shoveller,—so called from its broad, shovel-like bill; the eider-duck, and many others.

Jenny. I think I have heard something about the eider-duck. Does it not pull the down from its own body to build its nest?

Duck. Not exactly to build it, but to line it, and also to cover its eggs when it leaves them. The eider-ducks are greatly valued in all the Northern countries of Europe, both for the eggs, which are exceedingly well tasted, and for the down. This is especially the case in Iceland and Norway, where they abound. Every proprietor is desirous of having the eider-duck settle upon his estate, and, should these gentle birds show any signs of wishing to settle upon an island belonging to him, he removes his horses and cows to the mainland, that the ducks may have it all to themselves. Nobody ever thinks of

killing one; and the breeding-places are well watched, that neither cat, raven, nor any other enemy may approach them. Thus cared for and protected during the breeding-season, the eider-duck becomes very tame. You may walk among them, and even stroke their heads, without their disturbing themselves at all. The drakes keep very much by themselves till the breeding-season is over,—which, indeed, is the case with all wild ducks.

Jenny. How do they gather the down?

Duck. The eider-duck makes her nest of dead and rotten weeds, over which she lays a thick and soft bed of down, which she plucks for the purpose from her own breast. She then lays five or six eggs. These are taken, with the down which covers them; when she re-arranges her nest and lays again. These too are stolen from her. Again she lays; but she has no more down, and the drake supplies what is wanted. When the people discover, by the yellowish hue of the down, that this is the case, they leave the poor bird in peace to hatch her remaining eggs,—as, should these be interfered with, she would leave the place

and never return to it again. The down thus collected, when cleaned and dried, weighs about half a pound. Three pounds of this down may be squeezed into a ball small enough to hold in the hand, but when allowed to expand it is so elastic that it will fill a good-sized bed-cover or comforter. Nothing can be softer and warmer than these comforters,—which are a great luxury in cold climates. In Newfoundland, where the eider-duck is also found, the down is not collected; but the inhabitants eat both the birds and the eggs. As soon as the ducklings have broken the shell, the parents take them to the water, where they pass almost the whole of their lives, scarcely ever coming on shore except in the most tempestuous weather and in the breeding-season. The down of the king-duck—which has a strong resemblance to the eider-duck—is collected in the same way; but the eider-down is the more highly prized.

Jenny. I should like to see the eider-ducks sitting on their nests, and stroke their pretty heads. But their tempers must be quite dif-

ferent from your's, my dear friend, if they like to be approached while sitting.

Duck. Yes, indeed: I do not at all relish being interfered with when I am sitting, and should be very apt to give your little fingers a good bite. But we all have our own notions about such things.

Jenny. Why do you dabble your bill in the muddy water in that curious way? I should not think it would be very agreeable.

Duck. On the contrary, I find it exceedingly pleasant, and obtain many a savory morsel in that way. You see, my bill is formed for just such an operation. There is a row of prickles down each side of it, which act like two strainers, letting the mud and water in at one side and out at the other. The roof of my mouth is furnished with some very large and sensitive nerves, called nerves of taste, by means of which I try every thing that passes through the strainers and ascertain precisely what I wish to swallow and what not. By dabbling in the mud, as you call it, I can provide myself with a respectable dinner where another bird would starve,—though, for all

that, I like a good plate of scraps from the kitchen exceedingly. Oh, yes: a duck's bill is a more curious and elegant contrivance than man ever made, with all his ingenuity.

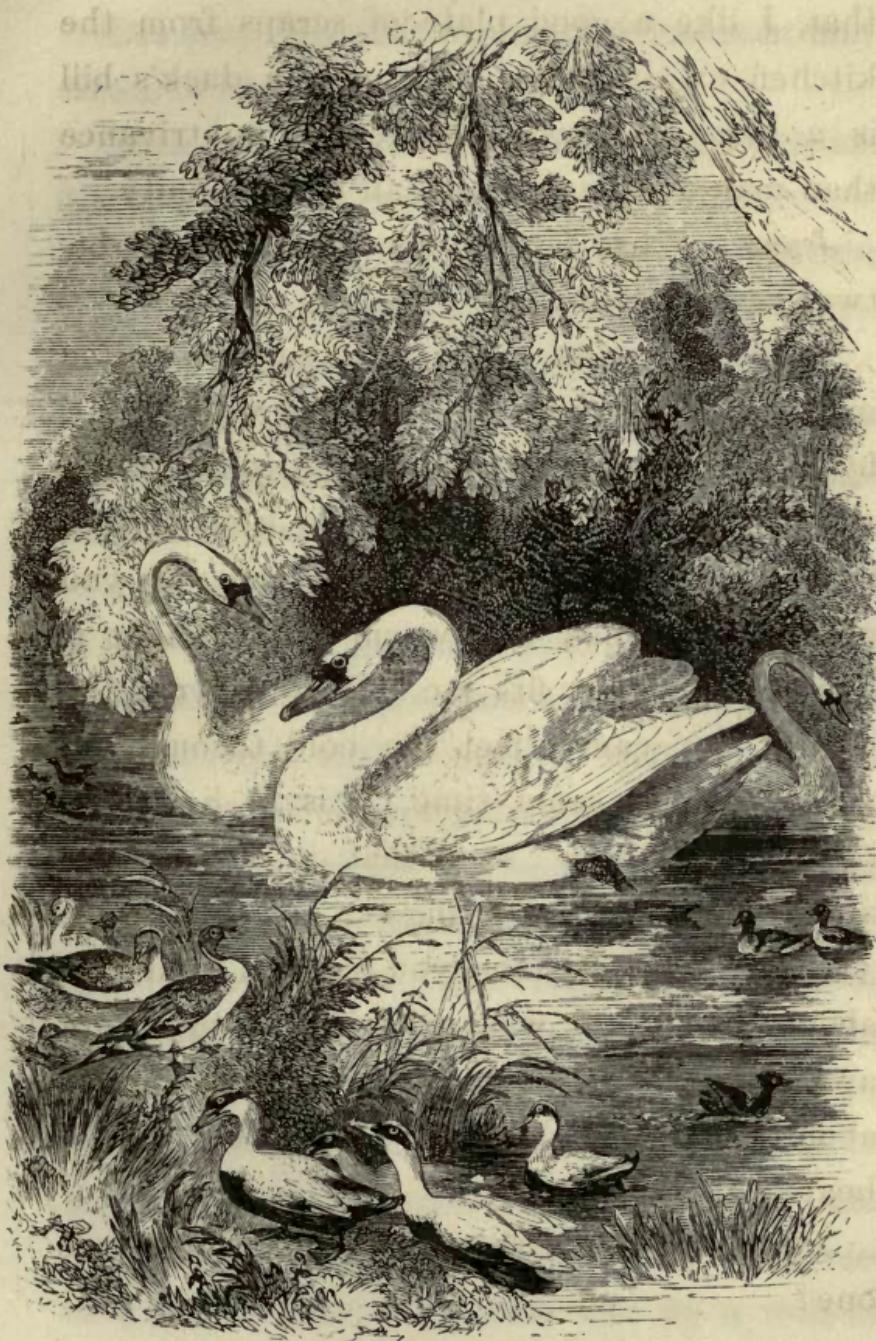
Jenny. What is the use of that skin between your toes?

Duck. It assists me in swimming. United in this way, my toes become like a broad oar, by means of which I push myself along in the water. Birds which have this kind of foot are called web-footed. Notice, too, if you please, how thick and warm my plumage is and how nicely it fits me. No water can get into it, nor can I feel the cold through it; while, at the same time, it is so light and buoyant—as they say—that it is of great assistance to me in floating.

Gander. Well, have you finished your talk about ducks? I was thinking, after I got away, that I had not told Miss Jenny a word about swans. I dare say you would like to hear of them.

Jenny. Indeed I should. Did you ever see one?

Jenny and the Birds.



Gander. No; but my mother has seen hundreds of them at once.

Duck. Hundreds of swans, cousin! Is not that rather a large story?

Gander. No, it is not. I am not in the habit of telling large stories.

Duck. Come, now; don't be offended.

Gander. But I am not exaggerating at all when I say that my mother has seen hundreds of wild swans on the Mississippi River, as well as on the small prairie-lakes of the West; and if you were to go there you might see them too. There are two species of swans in America, the one rather smaller than the other. The larger kind, or trumpeter, is found mostly at the West; while the smaller, or American swan, is seen in great abundance about the Lower Chesapeake. All these swans go far to the North to breed, returning southward at the approach of cold weather. They fly very high,—often several thousand feet above the earth,—proceeding in two converging lines, after the fashion of wild geese, though their progress is much swifter. A goose will fly a mile in a minute; but a swan will easily travel a hun-

dred miles in an hour. While flying, they present a singular appearance, their long necks being stretched out to their utmost extent, so that they appear to be almost all neck. As they pass along, the leader often calls to the rear files, to ask if they are coming on well, and is always answered with a cheerful response. When he is tired of his arduous position, he falls back, and another takes his place. When they alight for the night, (especially if others have arrived before them,) there is always a great deal of lively conversation among them, and again in the morning, before they set out on their day's journey.

Jenny. It must be a beautiful sight when large flocks of them, as white as snow, are gathered together, all diving and swimming about in the water. I should like to see them.

Gander. So should I. But allow me to correct you. Swans do not dive; although they can keep their heads under water for several minutes together without inconvenience. On this account, they prefer feeding-places where they can procure their food by merely bend-

ing their long necks. They eat a variety of water-plants, and are particularly fond of the grass which constitutes the favourite food of the canvas-backs; but neither worms, slugs, nor any other animal food within their reach comes much amiss to them. Then, again, in a large flock of swans you might see a number which would be of a deep lead-colour, with a flesh-coloured bill. These are the young ones hatched the previous season. They grow lighter-coloured with every month, till, at the age of six years, they display the snowy plumage and black bill which characterize the full-grown swan.

Duck. Well, I always supposed that all swans were white.

Gander. On the contrary, there are swans in Australia which are perfectly black.

Jenny. Australia seems to be the place for all sorts of curious animals. Every thing seems to go by contraries there. But pray, tell me, is it true that swans sing just before they die, as the old poets used to say?

Gander. No more than at any other time. I doubt, indeed, if the note of the swan would

be called singing by any person of a refined ear. True, the Icelanders compare these notes to the tones of a violin; but the appearance of the swan on the coast of Iceland announces to the inhabitants the close of a very long, cold and dreary winter, during which they hardly get a glimpse of the sun even in the middle of the day. So it is no wonder that their voices are considered musical, when they bring the welcome news that spring is close at hand. I suppose that, in truth, they are about as musical as geese, and no more.

Duck. And we all know how charming that is. Why don't you tell Miss Jenny about the flamingoes?

Gander. Tell her yourself, since you consider your voice so much more agreeable than mine. Every one admits that the quacking of ducks is melody itself.

Duck. You need not say that,—as if any one claimed any musical powers for ducks! I am sure I didn't. But, as long as your mother has seen the flamingoes in their native country, and they are related to you,—to both

of us, indeed,—I think you had better be the historian.

Gander. Would you like to hear about the flamingo, Miss Jenny?

Jenny. Certainly. I think I have seen his picture. Is he not a very long-legged, long-necked bird, of a beautiful scarlet colour?

Gander. You have described him exactly. He is all neck and legs; but, as he is always wading about in marshy and miry places, he finds his long stilts very convenient. From the top of his head to the end of his claws he often measures six feet,—though he does not, of course, stand quite so high as that. His body is about the size of a large goose; and his plumage is of a beautiful scarlet colour: so that, on seeing a flock of them drawn up in line, one might almost take them for soldiers. They are very shy birds, and keep at a distance from human habitations, preferring the flats, shallows and salt marshes of a sea-shore, where they procure their food by wading and swimming. They are found in considerable numbers about the Florida Keys. The female builds her nest in the marshes, taking

care to choose a very retired situation, where she scrapes together mud and sand into a hillock of the height of her own body. This hillock is hollowed out at the top into a cavity of a convenient size and shape, in which she deposits two or three white eggs. While brooding her eggs, she constantly supports herself on one foot: so that she may be said to sit standing. They are, in fact, hardly ever seen supported on both legs at once. The little ones run and swim as soon as they are hatched. They are not birds of passage, but remain all the year round in the warm countries where alone they are found. They are considered very good food; and the tongue especially was held to be a great delicacy by the ancient Romans, who used to give enormous prices for a dish made of flamingoes' tongues. On the whole, they are very handsome and harmless birds, and, if they could be tamed, would make a very pretty addition to our poultry-yards.

Duck. I am sure we do well enough without the great, sprawling creatures.

Jenny. I believe you mentioned herons as

among the birds that your mother met at the South.

Gander. Yes. Did you ever see one? There is now and then a solitary specimen to be met with, stalking along the lake-shore or following the course of the stream, pretending, as they always do, to be absorbed in thought, while at the same time they are only looking for something to eat. I believe they are generally called cranes about here.

Jenny. I saw one up by the mill-pond this very spring. He was standing on an old log over the water, and seemed to be looking for fish. He was a very tall bird, with a long neck and legs and a long, sharp bill. We crept up as quietly as we could; but the moment he caught a glimpse of us he spread his broad wings and flew away, with his long legs hanging down behind him.

Gander. That is his way. He is one of the most watchful birds in the world; and it requires a good marksman to get a shot at him. He is a fine-looking bird. But the large white heron is handsomer still, being as tall as a man, and of a beautiful snowy whiteness, with

a very fine and graceful crest and train. I am sorry to say that, with all his beauty, he is far from being an amiable bird. He lives in a constant quarrel with his cousin the blue heron, whom he puts to death whenever he gets him into his power; and he kills and devours, without mercy, young ducklings and all sorts of youthful water-fowl. Herons build on very high trees, making a large, flat nest; and should the season be favourable you may often see two or three nests on one tree. The males are very attentive to their mates while sitting, bringing them food several times a day. They do the same by the young birds when first hatched, but, as they grow older, the quantity of their food is diminished, and they are fed but once a day,—as if to accustom them to go without food when it becomes necessary. All the different kinds of herons, of which there are a good many, as well as the egrets, the spoon-bills, the ibises, and many others, belong to the great natural family of waders.

I have tried in these pages, as well as in "Jenny and the Insects," to tell my young friends, in a familiar and pleasant way, something about the beautiful and wonderful things which the great and good Creator has placed round about us. It would have been the work of a lifetime if I had tried to give them a complete account even of American birds: so that I have confined myself to a very few, and those of the commonest kinds. Even now I have been obliged to leave out some of which I would gladly have spoken, for fear of making this book too large and too expensive. I hope, however, that I have told them enough to make them long to know more of their history and habits.

A great many interesting books have been written on the subject, some of which, like those of the learned Dr. Gould, of London, and Mr. Audubon, are so very expensive and splendid that very few persons can afford to own them; while others, like those of Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Wilson on American birds, and Mr. Mudie upon British birds, are cheaper, and ought to be in every school-library. A great

deal may be learned from these books,—and much more from our own eyes and ears, if we are only careful to keep them open. Those who live in the country can find endless amusement and instruction in watching birds for themselves; and they will find out very soon that such knowledge is like all other knowledge,—the more we learn, the more we want to learn and the more we shall be able to learn; for it is true of knowledge, as our Saviour says:—“He that hath, to him shall be given; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.”

But, if we want to study nature—by which I mean all the works of God—to any advantage, we must strive to keep our mind and heart pure and holy. We cannot see and understand all the beautiful and curious and wonderful things which are around us, while our hearts are full of envy, anger and deceit and all sorts of evil passions, and our thoughts occupied with dress and gain and silly gossip about our neighbours. God, from whom, as we well know, comes every good and perfect

gift, will never give the hearing ear and the seeing eye and the understanding heart to such a one. We know that if we wish to understand a human author's work we must try to obtain something of the spirit in which he wrote; we must try to put ourselves in his place, and be like him more or less. And so, if we want to understand God's works, we must strive to be like God,—*godly*, as the good old word is: that is, we must be pure and loving and true and just as he is, and as he wants all his rational creatures to be.

THE END.

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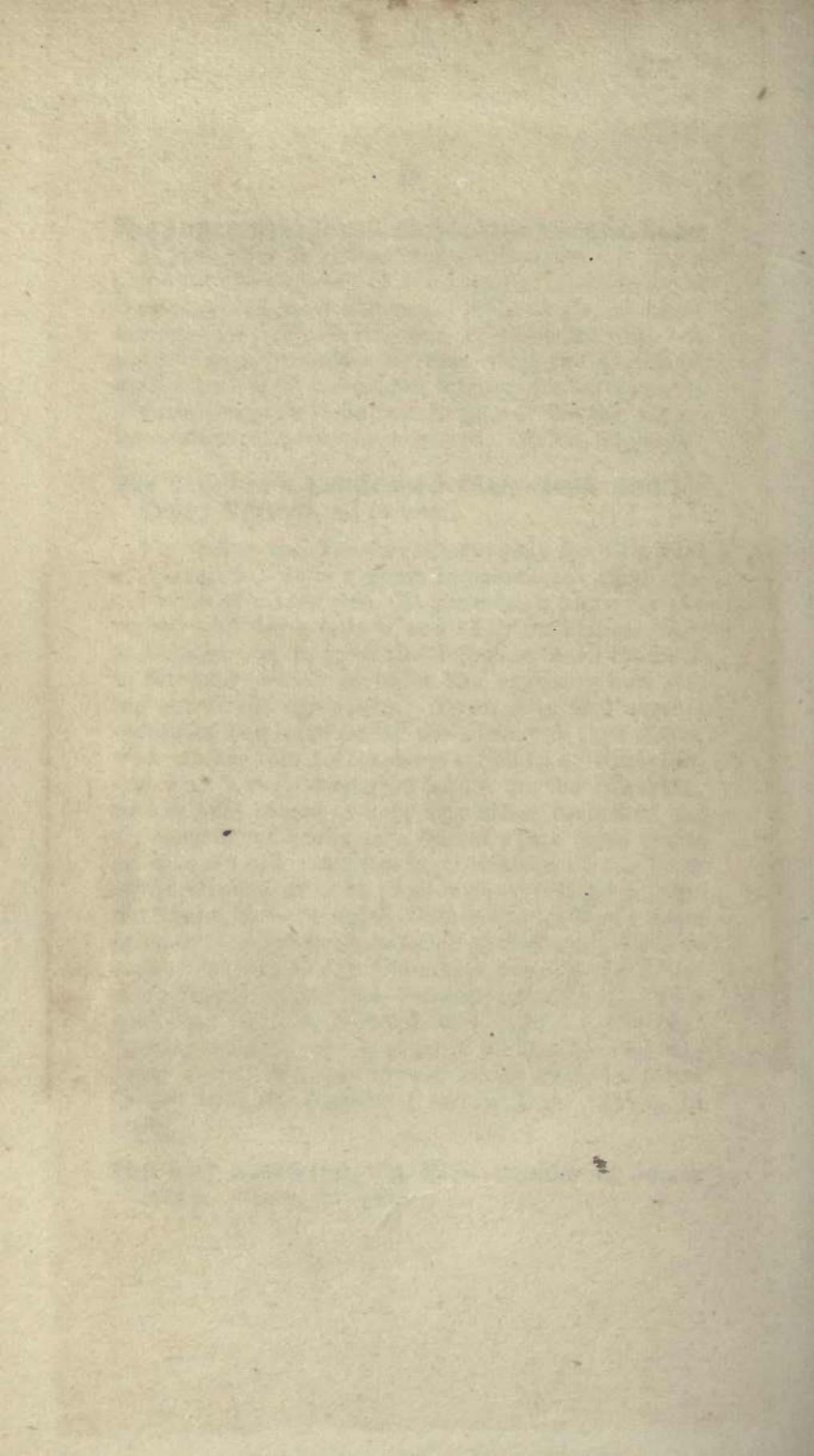
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